

DEVELOPING A PLAN TO MINISTER TO THE ELDERLY IN INDIA AS A
THEOLOGICALLY TRAINED WOMAN IN LIGHT
OF CULTURAL AND DENOMINATIONAL REALITIES

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To my parents and all the elderly of the
Bethel Mar Thoma Church of Hyderabad

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents the theologically trained woman's concept of a ministry for the aged. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a concrete plan to minister to the elderly, in the light of the denominational and the cultural realities of India. It details the action plan of the theologically trained woman for the wellbeing of the aged, through her proposed ministry. The project envisages a day-care center with an integral approach to the multi-factorial needs and problems of the elderly, wherein the pastoral skills of preaching, counseling and the leadership skills of the theologically trained woman will be used.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The motto of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar is “Lighted To Lighten.” As a theologically trained woman enlightened through my theological education, how can I, amidst cultural and denominational realities, bring light to the booming elderly population of India so that they may live and die in hope and peace in the Lord?

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This thesis is an attempt to develop a plan to minister to the elderly in India as a theologically trained woman, in the light of cultural and denominational realities, although I will not be implementing it right away.

1.3. The Problem and Its Setting

This thesis will explore an attempt of a theologically trained woman who to develop a plan to minister to the elderly in her context. Knowledge of her denominational and cultural realities of her church and country is necessary in the study. Therefore, a glimpse of the history of the Mar Thoma Church and the status of women through the ages in India will be addressed through this section on the problem and its settings.

1.3.1. The History of the Mar Thoma Church

The Mar Thoma church documents such as the church or sabha directory and books written by the Custodian of Church’s faith and practices, the

Metropolitan, Bishops and historians are used to re-count the history of the Mar Thoma Church.

To begin with, the church or sabha directory says the Mar Thoma Church is “one of the historical churches of the Christendom and belongs to the family of Lesser Eastern Churches.”¹ As the product of the undivided Malankara Syrian Church in India, M.T.C.’s history can be traced by looking into the origin of Malankara Syrian church in India.² But the history of missionary influence of the west that came with the British power in India brought about a desire for reformation in the Malankara Syrian church. Those who favored reformation and succeeded in implementing reforms became the reformed church called the Mar Thoma Syrian Church.³ Therefore as a reformed wing of the ancient Malankara Syrian Church, M.T.C. history can be divided into three eras: Pre- Reformation Era 52-1836 AD, Reformation Era 1836-1899 AD, and Post-Reformation Era 1899 AD-Present.⁴ Now let us look into how each era has contributed in to the formation and development of M.T.C.

1.3.1.1. Pre-Reformed Era (52-1836 AD)

In this era, we see that the Mar Thoma Church was the offshoot of the ancient Malankara Church founded by Saint Thomas the Apostle.

¹ Mar Thoma Sabha Directory, rev. ed. (Pathinamthita, India: The Publication Board of the Mar Thoma Church, 1999), 19.

² Mar Thoma Sabha Directory, 19.

³ Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan, *The Mar Thoma Church Heritage and Mission*, (Kottayam: The Ashram Press, 1985), 10-13.

⁴ Mar Thoma Church, *Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church: Heritage*, Mar Thoma Sabha office, www.marthomasyrianchurch.org/heritage.htm Accessed July 26 2007.

This ancient church had to face critical times with the Portuguese, Dutch and British political power fluctuations, trade and imposition of doctrine and customs alien to them, but at the same time had an understanding and acquaintance with the Persians, Jacobites and Western Missionaries. These influences left a lasting impact on the ancient church to the extent of leading to reformation movement.

Bishop Alexander in his book says that, “It is traditionally believed that St.Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, came to India in AD 52 and established the Church on the Malabar Coast.”⁵ This ancient Malankara Church is believed to have had friendly relations with Persians during the 4th to 15th centuries, which resulted from the migration of families from Persia to India under the leadership of Thomas of Cana.⁶ Bishop Alexander cites as evidence of this, “One sign of the Persian connections is the existence of Persian crosses, one of which is to be seen at the Valiyapally at Kottayam with an inscription in the Pahlavi language.”⁷

This was followed by the Portuguese power in India. During this period, the Roman Catholic Church tried to bring Syrian Christians under the papal authority and to follow their doctrines and customs⁸ through the

5 Alexander, 1.

6 Geevarughese Mar Theodosius, A *Glimpse of the early history of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church: in Gleanings*, ed. MJ Joseph (Bangalore: The Madras Calcutta Diocese of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, 1997), 108.

7 Alexander, 4.

8 Alexander, 5.

“Synod of Diamper at Udayamperoor held in 1599 AD under Alexis de Menezes, Archbishop of Goa,”⁹ thus making Syrian Christians part of Roman Catholic Church under the Pope.¹⁰ This continued for more than half a century.

The decline of Portuguese power and rise of the Dutch paved the way for the Syrian Christians to work to recapture their lost independence¹¹ and follow their ancient faith and traditions.¹² The Syrian Christians demonstrated their opposition to the Portuguese by taking an oath, touching the bent crossties with ropes placed in front of the church in Mattancherry.¹³ “The granite cross was slightly leaning and so this incident is known as the oath of the Coonan Cross (1653) (Coonan means bent).”¹⁴ Thus, they regained independence.

This resulted in the division of the ancient Malankara church into one opposing the Rome papacy and the other favoring it. The former became the Malakara Syrian Christians.¹⁵

The Malankara Syrian church elevated Archdeacon Thomas to the episcopate as Mar Thoma I with the help of Mar Gregorius Metropolitan of

⁹ Geevarughese, 109.

¹⁰ Alexander, 7.

¹¹ Alexander, 8.

¹² Geevarughese, 109.

¹³ Alexander, 8.

¹⁴ Alexander, 8.

¹⁵ Alexander, 8.

Jerusalem, a Patriarchate of Antioch.¹⁶ This result was a relationship between the Syrian church and the Antiochene Jacobites.¹⁷ "Thus the Episcopal continuity was restored with Mar Thoma I as the first Indian Metropolitan."¹⁸

"Towards the end of 18th century the power of the Dutch in India declined and the British became powerful."¹⁹ British resident Colonel Munro who was the resident of Travancore, the capital of Kerala, had keen interest in the Syrian Christians. He established a seminary and took interest in bringing the light of the gospel to the Syrian Christians whose spiritual level needed nourishment. Colonel Munro, with the help of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) in London brought the first C.M.S missionary, Rev Thomas Norton, to communicate the light of the gospel to the Syrian Christians. He found favor with the Metropolitan for his conduct and ability.

Thomas Norton was followed by three others who were actively involved in translation of the New Testament into Malayalam, seminary administration, and educational works respectively. After the return of these missionaries, two younger missionaries continued the work but did not succeed because of their arrogance and lack of tolerance. The Metropolitan and the Malankara Christians were also displeased with them and therefore resisted any change. These latter missionaries started working among non-Christians. But those among the

¹⁶ Alexander, 8-9.

¹⁷ Geevarughese, 109.

¹⁸ Alexander, 9.

¹⁹ Alexander,10.

Malankara Syrian Christians, who favored missionary activities, compelled the missionaries to build a church for them, as they preferred to use the Anglican prayer book for worship and rituals according to that order, although making a new denomination was not the purpose of their mission. This resulted in the formation of the Anglican diocese of Travancore. There were others who were similarly influenced by the missionary activities in light of the word of God. But, they wanted to stay in the Malankara Syrian Church itself and bring about a change in the church. This led to a reformation movement under the leadership of two teachers called Abraham Malpan and Geevarughese Malpan.²⁰ Thus, the movement led to the historical and most memorable moments of the Mar Thomas Church.

1.3.1.2. Reformation Era (1836 to 1899 AD)

The two teachers Abraham Malpan and Geevarughese Malpan who started the movement wanted reformation in the M.T.C. Their struggle was to remove unbiblical practices and customs from the church. The Mar Thoma Sabha Directory says, “They longed for removal of unscriptural customs and practices which had crept into the church over the centuries, and for reformation of the church in the light of the Gospel of our Lord.”²¹ They approached Col. Fraser, the British resident, for help but on rejection of their proposal decided to carry out their reform plan in their own parish. He translated the liturgy of Holy Communion from Syriac into Malayalam, the regional language, discarding the

²⁰ Alexander, 11-13.

²¹ Mar Thoma Sabha Directory, 23.

“prayers for dead” and “invocation of saints.” He celebrated the Holy Communion using the revised Saint James liturgy. He removed wooden images of saints, which were a source of income to the parish. He taught and preached the Bible at neighboring parishes.²²

Most prominent elements in the reformation were: 1. Return to the gospel message of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ; 2. Cleansing of wrong way of life, and 3. Taking up responsibility to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to others; 4. All these were centered in the study of the word of God. Thus the reformation movement was started.²³

“The emphasis on preaching of word of God led to revival meetings,”²⁴ conventions and bible study groups. Abraham Malpan was excommunicated but he continued with the reformation program. For achieving the change, he also needed the support of a Bishop. So, he prepared his nephew, a deacon whom he trained in the seminary to go to the Patriarch at Syria. The Patriarch was impressed by him and consecrated him as the Metropolitan with the name Mathews Mar Athanasius²⁵ and was declared by Malankara church “as the legal Metropolitan of the Syrian church in 1852.”²⁶ “Abraham Malpan died at the early age of 49 years, in 1845.”²⁷ Metropolitan Pulikottil Joseph Mar Dionysius who

22 Mar Thoma Sabha Directory, 23.

23 Alexander, 17-18.

24 Alexander, 18.

25 Alexander, 19-20.

26 Geevarughese, 110.

27 Alexander, 20.

was consecrated by the Patriarch of Antioch opposed reformers. Mathews Mar Athanasius consecrated his cousin as Thomas Mar Athanasius. As the Metropolitan of the church, Mathews Mar Athanasius had the possession of the Syrian seminary. Litigation as to who has to be the rightful Metropolitan of the Malankara church and possession of the seminary and other church property went on for a long time.²⁸ In the mean time, “Mathews Mar Athanasius died in 1877.”²⁹ All the responsibility of the court case was on Thomas Mar Athanasius. Finally, the case was decided as to who will be the rightful Metropolitan. The Patriarch of Antioch consecrated Joseph Mar Dionysius as the rightful Metropolitan. But if Thomas Mar Athanasius agreed to future consecrations by the Antiochian Patriarch, he would be recognized as Metropolitan of the Malankara Church. But he refused the demand to maintain the autonomy of the church and so the property and the seminary went to Joseph Mar Dionysius as the Metropolitan of Malankara church. Though the reformers lost control of the seminary and the property, they developed as a reformed church with autonomy.³⁰

Thus, the two groups in the church split to form two churches, the Jacobite Syrian Church and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. M.T.C. is hence the reformed Church of Malabar.³¹ Finally, the reformers succeeded in their attempt to reform

²⁸ Alexander, 20.

²⁹ Alexander, 21.

³⁰ Alexander, 21.

³¹ Geevarughese, 111.

the church although they had to start from a grass root level to give the form and structure to what Mar Thoma Church is today.

1.3.1.3. Post-Reformation Era (*1899AD –Present*)

Although the M.T.C. lost everything, with the exception of a couple of churches, it has today grown far and wide to west Asia, Africa, North America and Western Europe to become a worldwide church. The Mar Thoma Church, with its missionary favor has been able to communicate the gospel and plant churches in these areas. As the late Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan said

Even though the reform party lost their hereditary and rightful possessions it became the occasion for the people to turn to God and to go forward in faith, trusting in the power of God. This led to spiritual revival and great joy in spite of difficulties. It was this spiritual fervor, which sustained the people.³²

These revival meetings also led to one of the largest conventions in Asia conducted every year in February at the bank of the river Pamba in Kerala, the southern part of India. Every year speakers from India and abroad are invited to speak besides the M.T.C. anointed speakers. Ann Graham Lotz, daughter of the evangelist Dr. Billy Graham, was the speaker during the convention held in February 2007. Besides this there are conventions, retreats, and conferences at parish and diocesan levels.

With regard to the administration and other details of the church management and accountability, the Mar Thoma Church has a well-defined

³² Alexander, 21.

constitution based on the Bible, which makes it a very disciplined church. The M.T.C. has 13 diocese and 10 Bishops including a Metropolitan. It is a democratic church with Episcopal polity. The M.T.C is financially independent and the members of the church in India and abroad finance its activities. The Church maintains very good ecumenical relationship with its active participation in the World Council of Churches, the Christian Council of Asia, the National Council of Churches, and Kerala Council of Churches. The M.T.C. has various organizations to cater to the needs of all age group like Sunday School Samajam for the children, Yuvajana Sakhyam for youth and Women's Organization for every woman above 18 years of age.³³ The administrations of these organizations have a three-tier system, consisting of parish, the diocese and the central administration. Although each is autonomous, they are subject to the constitution of the church and bishop, metropolitan and then the representative body of the church respectively.

Although, women are only a silent spectator and have no role in the decision-making body of the church this far, the structure of the women's organization follows the same three-tier system. The women's organization also has the same pattern of administration subject to the constitutional authority with clergy as the president at the parish level, Bishop at the diocesan level, and Bishop and Metropolitan at the center.

³³ The Mar Thoma Church, *Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church: Heritage*, Mar Thoma Sabha Office, www.marthomasyrianchurch.org/heritage.htm. Accessed 26 July 2007.

Revival in the church did influence the women of the church too. As recipients of the revival, the women of the church did actively involve themselves in the evangelistic work of the church.

Although it still denies women any leadership roles with “its hierarchical structure and its three-fold ministry of clergy it has got, i.e., bishop, presbyters and deacons, women are excluded.”³⁴ Women’s services and support are utilized by the church not with due recognition but taken for granted. K.A. Abraham, a professor in the M.T.C. Seminary wrote, “It is to be acknowledged that women who constitute more than fifty percent of the laity are not taken seriously in the ministry.”³⁵ We have yet another evidence of the situation to support the condition of women. Editors, Jesudas Athyal and John J Thatamanil of the book *Mission in the Market Place* on a lively encounter with the Metropolitan Chrysostom of the Mar Thoma Church says,

On the participation of women in the life of the church, Bishop Chrysostom is candid enough to recognize the serious historical and ecclesiastical obstacles. For him, however, this is also the challenge before us. He agrees that the present liturgy was written at a time when concept of women’s involvement and their role in the life of the church was very different from what it is today. Therefore changes are necessary, not only in the liturgy but in the total life of the church. And he is personally prepared to go the extra mile in this direction.³⁶

³⁴ Rachel Mathew, *Participatory Role of Women in the Mar Thoma Church: Darshan* (Golemarket, New Delhi: Rev Zachariah Alexander, vol3, Issue-2, April-June 2001), 12.

³⁵ K.A.Abraham, *The Role of Laity in the Ministry of the church: Ministry and Spirituality; Contemporary Issues and Response*, PS Daniel, et al., eds. (Kottayam India: Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, 2001), 99.

³⁶ Jesudas M. Athyal and John J Thatamanil, eds., *Metropolitan Chrysostom on Mission in the Market Place* (Kerala:Christava Sahitya Samithy, 2002), 24.

Although the Bishop and the clergy are aware of the situation, there should be an earnest effort to educate the church in this matter if the church has to grow and change. Through the history, we have seen the Malankara Syrian church struggling for its Episcopal continuity, and discontinuity of some of the practices that were not biblical. The liturgy used for worship was also reformed on the basis of Bible, although, it maintains the eastern character. The Church is actively mission oriented. Thus M.T.C. maintains its oriental traditions and is also western in mission and outlook, thus making it a unique church.

After having had a glimpse of the historical background of the M.T.C. let us now look at the status of women in India.

1.3.2. History of Women and their Status in India

Varied historical issues have contributed to history of women and their status in India. A brief description of the different ages and historical factors in each age will give the history of women and their status in India. The three ages are the Vedic Age, Middle Age and Modern Age.³⁷ Saraswati Mishra with a broad view of the historic periods says ancient period is from B.C. 3000-1200 and medieval period from A.D. 1200- A.D. 1757 and finally modern period after 1757 A.D.³⁸ The status of women before Vedic Age cannot be stated with certainty because of the absence of enough literature. Therefore, we begin with the Vedic age for understanding the status of women. The decline in the status of

³⁷ Malathi Sharma, "The Status of Women" *The women's Decade 1975-1985 An Assessment*, Jyotsna Chatterji ed., (Delhi: I.S.P.C.K Published, 1985), 75.

³⁸ Saraswati Mishra, *Status of Indian Women* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 5

women started towards the end of Vedic era and but found its peak with the Mughal invasion in middle age.

1.3.2.1. Vedic Age (B.C. 2000 - B.C. 600)

This age is regarded the “Golden Age of Women”³⁹ in India. In this age women in India enjoyed life to it’s fullest. They were not confined to household chores but had the privilege of engaging in private and public activities and commanded great respect in the society.⁴⁰ Lacy John in her article mentions

At the beginning of Vedic era there was participation of women in public life of the villages. At the time of Vedas the women of the upper strata in the towns married at the age of sixteen and apparently spent considerable time in Vedic studies before marriage. There were life long students of theology called Brahmavadins.⁴¹

They also engaged in variety of occupations besides domestic work.⁴² Thus, women had the freedom in the growth of their personality, using their gifts and enjoying life to the fullest extent.

1.3.2.2. Middle Ages (A.D. 1200 – A.D. 1757)

Unlike the Vedic age, the middle age became the “Dark Age for women.”⁴³ Mughals brought about a sudden fall in the status of women. All sorts of evil

39 Malathi Sharma, 75.

40 Malathi Sharma, 75.

41 Lacy John, “*Women through Decades Experience and Conceptions*” Vision, Gee varghese Mar Athanasius, et al., (Manganam, Kottayam, Kerala, India: T.M.A.M.Orientation Centre, 1995), 2-3.

42 Lacy John, 3.

43 Malathi Sharma, 76.

practices crept into this period and women became victims of these evil practices.⁴⁴ The quotation below states the struggles of women during that period.

It was in this age that education for women stopped and they became victims of evil customs. The practice of early child-marriage and the purdah system came to be established in this period. Some social scientist has very rightly described the Moghul era as the dark ages for women. By the end of this era, women no longer enjoyed the freedom of the earlier times, and even within the family as a unit, their importance became nil. The pages of the history of this age are indeed, figuratively speaking, black in color, due to the oppression meted out at this time.⁴⁵

Women's cries and their groaning must have reached God, and Lord Almighty is not the one to keep quiet in such a situation. There was a gradual but remarkable change in the status of women in the next period.

1.3.2.3. Modern Age (19th Century-Present)

Here again, the status of women underwent a lot of change. The presence of women has increased remarkably in all fields. There are women holding high offices in a number of fields. A case in point is the election of the first ever women president of India in 2007. Malathi gives a very vivid picture of the changes that took place in the modern age in India.

In the 19th century and the 20th century once again the status of women underwent a change. The century ushered in better times. Women began to understand themselves better and also to perceive their problems

⁴⁴ Malathi Sharma, 75.

⁴⁵ Malathi Sharma, 75-76.

according to fresh perspectives. In the social, educational and political fields, revolutionary changes began to take place, in the new environment; there was a re-examination of the status of women.

Women became vocal and demanded legal and political rights for themselves. In time, the whole attitude of society and the attitude of women themselves changed for the better. The thinking of women, their beliefs, their response to traditional customs, their way of life, etc., changed as the times change.⁴⁶

But have these changes still improved in the sense of its gravity? There are still institutions that hold on to inequality and are medieval in thinking and action. Churches in India are no exception. Churches that are not open to change also exist in the modern age. “Patriarchy socializes men and women to accept their dominant and submissive positions respectively as normative in church and in society.”⁴⁷ This clearly means we have along way to go. Malathi Sharma says, “It will be education above all that will change the fallen status of women. Through education women will learn, not only about others, but also something about themselves.”⁴⁸ I am sure this is what I as a theologically trained woman have been inspired not to just look for opportunity but become an opportunity to minister. My varied experiences as a theologically trained woman will enable me to present the denominational realities that exist in the church in the present day.

46 Malathi Sharma, 76.

47 Evangeline Anderson- Rajkumar, “Significance of the ‘Body’ in Feminist Theological Discourse” *Bangalore Theological Forum* (Bangalore, India: The United Theological College, Volxxxiii, No.2, December 2001), 87.

48 Malathi Sharma, 77.

1.4. My Own Experience as a Theologically Trained Woman

Given below are the varied experiences I have had as theologically trained woman:

1.4.1 My Experience as a Student of Mar Thoma Theological Seminary

The Mar Thoma Church has no biblical or theological reasons for precluding the participation of women in the ministry of the church, yet it was a struggle and challenge for me to study in the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary. The seminary was initially founded with the purpose of training men to ordained ministry of the church. Admission to women came into force only half a century later. I was one among the fourth batch of women students to do theological studies in 1991. I had to meet my own financial expenses, as the Mar Thoma church did not sponsor me. The Mar Thoma Church sponsors only male candidates preparing for ordained ministry of the church.

Five years since women were first admitted was not much time for the attitude of the seminarians to change regarding women for training and ministry. Negative and unfriendly attitudes did prevail in the campus. I still recollect the final gathering at Bishop House for tea as graduating students. We were two women graduating that year. The Bishop enquired about what we are going to do after our studies, when the rest of the male candidates were for ordination. I informed him that I was appointed by Chennai-Bangalore diocese to work among the youth. My colleague was appointed to work among the youth in Bombay

diocese. The Bishop was happy and said “Oh! This is like the scripture says, many are called, but few are chosen.” Some of my classmates who had nothing to lose either with our appointment or with the comment were offended by the Bishop’s comment and wanted to avoid tea. This showed their hostility against women being chosen by God. It was indeed a struggle and challenge to study in such an atmosphere. My call from God was above all such constraints and unfriendly atmosphere. This deep sense of call from God helped me through my seminary life.

1.4.2. My Experience as a Worker of Mar Thoma Church

Ordination is an optional sacrament to the church. Although this sacrament involves personal choice, it is only for the men, while such an option does not exist for women. This means women are not ordained ministers but this does not mean they cannot involve themselves in any other ministries of the Church. It is the great commission of the Lord to all who believe in Christ. I may not be ordained by the church as a minister but I am ordained by God to minister; therefore, I decided to follow my call of God who has called me to ministry. I informed the church of my availability to work. I was asked to join the Chennai-Bangalore diocese to work among the youth. It was on condition that I will be given only some pocket money and a very minimal amount towards dorm rent or house rent, knowing very well that in that city house rent and dorms were very expensive. I again took it as a challenge. I continued with the ministry with the moral and financial support of my father although I was taxing him in this matter as he had other commitments in the family as a retired man.

1.4.3. My Experience as a Daughter of Aging Parents

Families did not encourage women for theological studies and in ministry in general. Initially my parents did not encourage me to go for theological studies because of the insecure atmosphere I will be putting myself. Things were not very much different from what they feared. Since they did not want to be a hindrance to God's call in my life, they supported me. My parents had to meet all expenses incurred while I studied and also worked. Things have become so difficult to manage now, as my parents have become old and they need my support with their ageing needs. My parents do not want me to go away from home to a situations where the church will not be able to provide enough financial and social security to me. Especially because they are not in a position to support me anymore in these regards, the church does not think it as their responsibility. But at the same time various ministry situations in the church expect my help as a theologically trained women of which ministry to the elderly is one among them.

1.4.4. My Experience as a Theologically Trained Woman in Society and Church

Many appreciate me for choosing a challenging task. They look at me very differently. All my actions, words and deeds are closely monitored and people expect me to be different from the rest of the world. As an ordinary worker of the church ministering to others, my behavior and attitude has to be conforming to the pattern set by the society, which again is cultural. But when it comes to a leadership role in the church all traditions and patriarchal settings come in.

Outside the Christian circle many are not aware of my training, my education and ministry. It is only when I say that I am a counselor or pastor that they understand what my education and ministry signifies. Some of them feel it's ridiculous to be in the ministry because it is only for male clergy. It is God's grace that He is using me despite all these constraints to create awareness among the people of the need for theological training and ministry. God used me a lot, as I worked among youths to speak to His children and bring about change in their lives.

Many parents in the Mar Thoma Church request me to minister to their youths and the elderly who want me to minister to them. But, to work in the Mar Thoma Church where a bishop cannot make an unofficial visit to a parish without informing the priest, how can I, a woman without any official recognition of the church, minister to the people who expect my service?

1.4.5. My Experience as a Theologically Trained Woman Pursuing

Higher Studies

My experience in the ministry helped me realize that the work of a woman without ordination is hardly acknowledged. I have to tell everyone I am theologically trained and I do ministry because we do not have any order in the church that helps people to identify us women in ministry. Therefore, I thought I would pursue my studies and get a recognized doctorate in ministry as this will strengthen my theological foundation in order to gain acceptance as a theologically trained women and will help me in my ministry. When I requested financial help from one of the Bishops of my church to do my Doctoral program he refused it on the ground that the Mar Thoma Church does not have any

responsibility towards theologically trained women of the church. But, I must admit that many of my classmates from Mar Thoma seminary did help me to pursue my studies within their limited capacity. I have to face socio-economic struggles like any other theologically trained woman. I too fear being snubbed for openly speaking the truth. I love my church for its accountability and for the disciplined constitution made on the basis of the Bible. But the MarThoma Church, as one body of Christ needs to be organic by men and women working together and should not become inorganic by not giving space to theologically trained woman to exercise her God given potential for the glory of God. By organic I mean one perfect body with all its organs present in it. Inorganic is absence of an organ making the body imperfect and dead.

1.5. My Call and the Growing Sense of Opportunities to Minister to the Elderly

My call to ministry is God's perfect plan. I was born with a serious congenital heart problem. But at the age of four at the medical colleges and hospital my mother introduced me to the Lord, asking me to cast all my burdens on the Lord, who alone could untiringly help me and save me. I never thought God had a perfect plan for my life. God in his own time molded me for his glory through two complicated heart surgeries. Doctors have witnessed my death during the surgery, but then witnessed the return of life. I see this as the plan of God for me. He made me realize that I am made for Him and I owe Him more than can be repaid in my lifetime.

I have not found my identity in Christ or my employment as a theologically trained woman of the Mar Thoma Church, but the situation I am in forces my aged father to support me financially in the Indian tradition. My parents worry about the insecure situation I will be in since they cannot continue to support me, and although they want me to minister in region where I was raised, it is clear that now I need to support and care for them. This is difficult since the Church holds to some of the false traditions that deprive women of justice. But I do not want to break the commandment of God for the sake of traditions. For, honoring my parents is what God expects from me.⁴⁸

This problem has led me to think of those elderly people, who are unable to live peacefully in their sunset years because of loneliness, lack of moral support, constraints to use their potential until God calls them to glory, and a lack of respect from younger people for the feelings of the elders in matters of life, in the church, society and home. But the same time the demands of jobs force children to be away from home, unable to cater to the needs of their elders.

Elderly people have certain expectations about me as a theologically trained woman. Their demands make me active in ministry. This creates a sense of opportunity to minister to them. Their expectations for me are to pray, to listen to their feelings and experiences, to meet their spiritual needs through preaching, bible study, singing and worship, to respect their views and use their potential, to give them fellowship and company, to care for them and understand their

⁴⁸ Matthew 15: 3-4a NASB.

struggles. These expectations have created a growing sense within me of opportunity to minister to the elderly.

1.6. Needs of the Elderly

The needs of the elderly will be addressed further in the literature review part of the thesis as the views of various researchers are considered. There tends to be an imbalance of various dimensions of human personality as people age, such as differences in physical, mental, spiritual, social and environmental aspects. But external pressure should not force them to age prematurely and lead to a deadness of the dimensions of one's personality, leading to hopelessness and unhappiness. One of the purposes of this thesis is to identify on what the elderly need and how can I minister to those needs.

The following are the needs of the elderly that will be dealt with:

1.6.1. Physiological Needs

I have noticed that aging brings a decline of body structure, senses and other body organs leading to health problems. Some of the elderly complain about various physical ailments, especially if they were undernourished in their early years. But, a decline of health differs from person to person depending on their circumstances, body constitution and lifestyle. For example, a person of seventy may be the head of a church and very active, but a person of seventy may also be bed ridden.

Emotional and social disturbances also follow a decline of physical aging. I have heard the elderly complain about their children and young people in the church asking them not to engage in any activities at home and church but sit in

one corner of the house or at pew. When they are physically old but psychologically young, this type of attitude towards them will bring them to isolation and social deadness. They also start feeling isolated even when retired and have to sit idle all of a sudden, cutting away from the world they related to for number of years. This gives rise to social needs.

1.6.2. Psychological Needs

An abnormality in feelings, attitudes and perceptions of elderly signify the onset of the ageing process. They may not be able to bear losses, do not expect a change in attitude and they may not be open to new ideas. My seventy-year-old father lost his two siblings last year. He was very much affected by their sudden demise. It caused him lots of aches and pains. He started losing confidence in his own ability. Many elderly complain of feeling lonely and anxious.

Fear of aged parents whose children are not settled in life is also a cause of anxiety to parents in India. They feel an abnormal helplessness in challenging situations. The elderly do not age just physically but also psychologically, so they need help to live with confidence until they die.

1.6.3. Spiritual Needs

I have observed that religion is important to the aged because elderly women of my women's prayer group consider it indispensable. They give great importance to one's devotional life. They want to spend more time in Bible reading, prayer and listening to sermons of radio or television preachers, evangelists and other speakers. But children and young people may want to

watch something entertaining, like cartoon and movies all the time. Therefore, elders cannot watch religious programs on T.V. in their vernacular language, and that becomes stressful to them. They feel they need to offer prayers regularly and engage in religious activities but may face constraints because of the difficulty of traveling alone or their physical condition. They expect the church and those in ministry to support them in finding meaning in life and help increase their faith in God. They expect fellowship and visitation. This is what most of the elderly expect from me as a theologically trained woman.

1.6.4. Financial Needs

Elderly people face financial problems as their income becomes low and they may have very little accumulated wealth, therefore making it difficult to maintain their living standards, buy food, clothing and meet other social needs. In the case of Indian women who are not given any rights over property and income, their trouble increases. If an elderly woman is a widow, and if she has to remain dependant on others she will have to face even more trouble.

In light of the needs outlined above, the question remains: How can I, as a theologically trained woman, develop a plan to minister to the elderly, given cultural and denominational realities, but also knowing the needs of the elderly and the growing sense of opportunity in ministering to them? That is what will be dealt in the following chapters through the theological background, literature review, project design and finally the evaluation and outcome.

1.7. Synopsis of the Remaining Chapters

Here is a synopsis of what the remaining chapters will address:

1.7.1. Theological Background

This chapter will deal with the theology and biblical teachings on the role of women in the ministry in general, and specifically ministry to the elderly.

Relevant Old Testament and New Testament passages will be examined for the scriptural information on the topic being discussed to help in developing the plan.

1.7.2. Literature Review

This chapter will deal with books, articles, journals, church documents and other publications relevant to the topic. Such materials are rather limited in India, but those available will be examined to help in developing a plan to minister to the elderly.

1.7.3. Project Design

This project will focus on developing a plan that is to meet the various needs of the elderly in an atmosphere similar to their home environment so that the elderly will not need to be institutionalized and segregated. They will be given responsibilities to help themselves and opportunities to exercise their potential, thus giving them more self-respect and meaning in their lives.

1.7.4. Evaluation and Outcomes

This chapter will deal with the possible positive and negative responses to the plan developed. In spite of any possible negative responses to the plan, the positive elements of the plan will help me as a theologically trained woman to carry out ministry to the elderly. The positive elements of the plan are their practicality in ministering to the elderly in their sunset years and helping them to live and die in hope and the peace in the Lord.

1.8. Conclusion

This first chapter has addressed the cultural and denominational realities under which I propose to develop a plan to minister to the elderly in India as a theologically trained woman of the Mar Thoma Church. It also addressed the needs of the elderly and my sense of calling to ministry to the elderly in India.

The Mar Thoma Church has organisation to minister to the youth, the teens, children and women. Although the youth, middle aged and other lay leaders of the Mar Thoma Church can step in, take care of the elderly, and serve their cause, they have neglected to do so. There are various other ministries open and fit for the theologically trained women like the youth ministry, the Sunday school and the women's ministry. They can teach in Seminaries, take up counselling and personal evangelism. They too can minister to the elderly. But the constraints in the Church hinder them from moving ahead with their task.

But here I as a theologically trained woman with a call for ministering to the elderly through this thesis-project will make my case that theologically-trained women are well-suited to minister to the elderly in the light of the cultural and denominational realities of the Mar Thoma Church in 21st Century India.

Since ages, women have been serving their elderly at home with their God-given gifts of incredible patience, love and affection. They serve their elderly with unflinching devotion and loyalty and make their presence indispensable to the families. But today with the transition of women from home-makers to working women, women find little time for their elderly and therefore the elderly are left to fend for themselves. Besides the cultural and denominational

constraints prevent women from taking up challenges and playing a pro-active role. The phenomenon of the greying population is posing a challenge to the church and to the Christian ministers as a whole. Therefore, the ministry for the elderly cannot be ignored.

For the theologically trained woman, this ministry is a good match because she is better equipped than others to serve the elderly. Her theological training has empowered her to lead a meaningful life in Christ. Her own struggle as a theologically trained woman of the M.T.C. has been instrumental in opening her heart to the people in need. It has helped her to empathise with the elderly and understand the magnitude and severity of their problems.

With the God-given gift of women to nurture, care and serve, the theologically trained women can make a significant difference to the lives of the elderly. It's the sense of call that she commits herself totally to the cause of the elderly. This makes her service to the elderly more fruitful. The Chapters that follow will reinforce the point that the theologically trained women are particularly well-suited to minister to the elderly in the light of the cultural and denominational realities of the M.T.C. in the 21st century India.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the theological basis on which the writer as a theologically trained woman will develop a plan to minister to the elderly, in light of denominational and cultural realities in India. The reality of the issue is the unfavorable condition of a woman on one hand and the sense of her call to minister to the elderly on the other hand. To provide the biblical and theological basis for the topic addressed in the thesis, the writer has chosen women characters from the Old and the New Testaments. These women could discover their vocation and God given talents by responding to God's call, irrespective of the constraints of their situations. The principles derived from the Bible and in the interplay of its characters will be used to equip oneself to equip others. In a context that determines women's vocation by the denominational and the cultural realities of India, it is the writer's attempt to discover her own vocation through her God-given gifts and skills to play her role in God's plan of salvation for this world. But before addressing theological foundations in this chapter, it is necessary to state the relevance of theological education for empowerment of self and to empower others to leadership roles. "Empowerment is a term used in the people's movement", according to K. C. Abraham.¹

¹ K.C. Abraham, "Theological Education for Empowering the people of God" in *Bible Speaks Today: Essays in Honor of Gnana Robinson*, ed., Daniel Jones Muthunayagom (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 288.

So, we then begin with the determinants of women's vocation and the need for empowerment of oneself to empower the people of God. This chapter will also emphasize the importance of theological training and the need for spiritual evolution in consecrating oneself to become a channel of transformation. Here are a select few women characters of the Old Testament and the New Testament who proved their mettle in times of crisis and became a blessing to their community. This chapter also details the need for ministering to the elderly and the writer's readiness to serve and empower them to a better life.

2.2. Determinants of Women's Vocation and the Need for Empowerment of Oneself

The role of women and their involvement in the active life of the church is not a new topic, but is one writers have tried to grapple with. The prevalence of unfavorable conditions for women to minister affects the testimony of the church, and some of the church leaders in India deny the existence of such a condition in their churches. But as Jey J. Kanagaraj points out, "Most of the denominations are still not prepared to ordain women and empower them to leadership roles. The patriarchal society in which we live thinks that women can better build up homes than the church."² The culture and denominational realities of the writer, as seen in the previous chapter, are unfavorable for women to exercise God-given gifts and one's call to action. However, the writer's church believes that the impediments in the empowerment of women are cultural and traditional rather than theological. This means that the denominational and the cultural ethos

² Jey J. Kanagaraj, "The profiles of women in John: House-Bound or Christ-Bound," in *Bangalore Theological Forum*, Vol. xxiii, No 2 (December 2001), 60.

determines women's vocation. These factors will prevent women from stepping into leadership roles, with opportunities to become an instrument for God to use. The denial of opportunities, rejection, unfavorable conditions and ostracism will only create in women an apathy towards the ministry. Walter C. Wright defines leadership as a relationship of influence, "a transforming relationship in which the leader invests in the growth and development of the followers, empowering them to become what God has gifted them to be."³ A hierarchical and male dominated denominational set-up will not empower women. How do we empower women to empower others? It is possible only through "mentoring relationships, coaching and team building"⁴ says Wright. Seminary life and theological education does help in the empowerment of women through its mentoring relationship.

2.3. The Relevance of Theological Training to Empower People of God

As seen in the previous chapter, only education can help them to change one's attitude to oneself and to others. That is why, R.T. France says, "Those who must teach are those who have yet to learn."⁵ That is the case with the use of other pastoral skills too. There is another quote that supports this view, which Sakhi Athyal points out: "the emphasis in 1Timothy 2:11f is for women to learn."⁶

3 Eugene H. Peterson, Foreword to *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service*, by Walter Wright (Secunderabad: OM Head Lines, 2005), 44.

4 Walter Wright, *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service*, 44.

5 R.T. France, *Women in the Church's Ministry: A Test-Case for Biblical Hermeneutics* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), 64.

6 Sakhi M Athyal, *Indian Women in Mission* (Bihar: Mission Education Books, 1995), 30.

The question of the authors of *Aging the Fulfillment of Life* rightly fits into this context when they ask, “How can we listen to their pain when their stories open wounds in us that we are trying to cover up?”⁷ Though the church does not assign any leadership role to the woman in the ministry, the needs of the booming elderly population of India does call the writer for the ministry. Her readiness for this ministry is the result of the empowerment she received through her theological education. Therefore, unless we are empowered, how can we empower others? Our theological education should help in empowering the people of God.⁸ Therefore, it is important that women need to be theologically trained. There is truth in what M. V. Abraham argues, “It is equally important that theological training has to be helpful in developing patterns of ministry that are suitable to meet the challenges and demands of the context.”⁹ Therefore, the writer empowered through her theological education has sensed the need to empower the people of God. But this needs spiritual evolution in a “leader as a person” to consecrate oneself to the divine call to empower others. Let us look into this aspect of a leader.

7 Henri J. M. Nouwen and Walter J. Gaffney, *Aging the Fulfillment of Life* (New York: Image Books, 1976), 99.

8 K.C. Abraham, 286.

9 M.V. Abraham, “Theological Education and Pastoral Ministry” in *Ministry and Spirituality: Contemporary Issue sand Responses*, P.S. Daniel, et al., eds. (Kottayam: Mar Thoma Seminary Publication, 2001), 15.

2.4. Need of Spiritual Evolution in Consecrating Oneself to Become a Channel of Transformation

The denominational and cultural context may not encourage women to lead a ministry, but God can transform this adversity into an affirmative platform for ministry, because God chooses the unlikely to do the impossible.¹⁰ Ministry is presence, God is very much present in all situations and God needs consecrated channels to work. How one can become a vehicle of change in God's hands in a given situation needs to be understood by looking into the Bible, and by looking up to the Lord of all situations. God's divine plan can bear fruit through the minister, the pastor, the theologically trained woman or the leader who has evolved spiritually. This is an on-going process. Therefore, this spiritual evolution calls for one's own spiritual maturity, understanding of the unique call, pastoral identity, accountability, integrity, commitment, interpersonal relation, intra-personal relation and passion for ministry. This is what 2 Cor 5:16-17 says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature; the old things passed away: behold, new things have come."

With the in-Christ experience and the grace of God bestowed upon us, the writer believes what Sakhi Athyal believes: "If God has given women gifts, who can stop women from ministering to the body?"¹¹ This decision to invest one's life and gifts for God to use is one's personal response to the divine call and it is born out of spiritual evolution. This helps to consecrate oneself to become a

¹⁰ Pam Farrel, *Women of Influence: Ten Traits of Those Who Want to Make a Difference*, rev. ed. (Down Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), 84.

¹¹ Sakhi M. Athyal, 37.

channel of transformation. We can see the emphasis on spiritual maturity, when Richard and Catherine Kroeger's book on women elders questions, "Are we sometime selecting second-class males because we are not willing to consider God's gift of spiritually-mature female elders?"¹²

Here are some of the women characters of the Old and the New Testaments who responded to God's call in their lives amidst unfavorable conditions. They became a blessing to God, to others and to themselves, in their respective roles. They were vocational servant-leaders and not just professional leaders. Such leaders aim at enabling their followers in dealing with their problems according to the will of God.¹³ But in the Indian context, women are least likely to get an opportunity to minister. That God chooses the unlikely to do the impossible is exemplified through the biblical characters given below.

2.5. Select Women Characters of the Old Testament

2.5.1. Esther

Scripture Reference: Book of Esther

Esther is an unlikely candidate to rescue and save a whole nation by herself. She carries out the purpose of God through a dinner party she hosted to save the nation from genocide. She offered God her talents of hospitality and beauty to invest in God's plan for the nation.

¹² Richard and Catherine Kroeger, *Women Elders: Called by God?* (Louisville: The Office of Women's Advocacy, 2001), 40.

¹³ Alice P Mathews, *Preaching that Speaks to Women* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 138.

She became a vehicle for God to reach out to his people.¹⁴ Having spoken of the sublime beauty of Esther's character, Thelma Johnson says, "It does not matter who we are or what circumstances we are in, God has work for each of us to do. All around us, there are many opportunities open to serve a needy world. If we are ready, we can be sure; God will use us to care for those struggling around us."¹⁵ We see the readiness of Esther to invest in God's plan of salvation for the world.

2.5.2. Miriam

Scripture Reference: Exodus chapter one

Miriam in the Old Testament is referred to as a prophetess. She lives at a time when the Pharaoh is dealing ruthlessly with the Israelites. Her sibling's life is in danger because of the Pharaoh's order to kill the male child. She is in a trauma. She is faced with the prospect of seeing her brother die and also face the shocking grief and agony of her parents. It is a very unfavorable situation in which Miriam is placed. If she saves the baby, she is not only going to save her baby brother but the people of God, the Israelites. She is called for a great ministry. Her readiness to be available even in hostile conditions will not only save her brother and her grieving mother, but also a whole Israelite community and herself. God has a special plan for the baby and Miriam. Any child of her age may not be mature enough to stay there, guard and act in times of need. She is gifted for that and called for that purpose. She responds readily to become a

¹⁴ Pam Farrel, *Women of Influence: Ten Traits of those who want to make a Difference*, 84.

¹⁵ Thelma Johnson, E., *Women of the Bible: 24 Characters* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2000), 80.

blessing to the community. Her very involvement in God's plan to remain and guard her brother is profitable to God. It makes her the leader of that situation. Thelma Johnson says, "They, in turn looked up to her as their leader and ministering angel. Undoubtedly, it was Miriam who first laid the foundation for God's work among women, which has since become an integral part of the life of the church throughout the world."¹⁶

2.5.3. Deborah

Scripture Reference: Judges Chapter four

We can see another woman who used her God-given gift of prophecy to have the disputes of Israelites adjudicated and Sisera destroyed. She is Deborah, the prophetess and the only woman Judge over Israel. We see her readiness to involve herself in God's plan of action for Israelites by going along with Barak when he wanted her to go with him. She used her prophetic gift to encourage Barak to proceed with the task of chasing Sisera into the tent, where he was to be killed by Jael, Heber's wife. The Lord would go ahead of Barak leading him to victory. Thus Deborah invested herself and her prophetic gift to help in God's plan for the Israelites. She becomes the leader of the situation, leading, guiding and directing through her God-given prophetic gift. Alice Mathews's comment in the story of Deborah is apt: "God's gift to Israel in an hour of terrible need was wrapped in the body and mind and heart of a woman. Deborah shatters some of our stereotypes about what leadership should be."¹⁷

¹⁶ E. Thelma Johnson, 19.

¹⁷ Alice Mathews, *A Woman God Can Use* (Grand Rapids, Discovery House: 1990), 61.

Our readiness to invest our lives and gifts according to God's direction and plan will leave a lasting impact on even the most stringent setting for change. In the words of Herbert Lockyer, "Occasionally, a strong-minded and unique woman breaks in upon human history and by her exploits leaves the impact of her personality upon events and secures for herself an imperishable honor."¹⁸

2.5.4. Ruth

Scripture Reference: Book of Ruth

Having seen the involvement of Miriam and the prophetess Deborah, we come to a woman who has no obvious prophetic gifts. But she did have a prophetic vision and leadership qualities like loyalty, accountability, integrity and commitment that could make her instrumental in God's plan of action. She was a source of joy to her mother-in-law too, and went on to become the great grandmother of David, and an ancestor of Jesus. Although the situation ahead of her was unfavorable and bleak, she was ready to invest her life and gifts in God. After her husband's death Ruth could have returned to her homeland but she refuses to leave Naomi's side and embraces Naomi's God and her people. She tells her mother-in-law, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death

¹⁸ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Secunderabad: OM Authentic Books,2007), 40
Mathews, *A Women God Can Use*, 61.

parts you and me.”¹⁹ She is ready to face the unfavorable condition. She is ready to share Naomi’s desolation. This resulted in her becoming an instrument for mutual empowerment between her and Naomi, thus becoming the leader of that situation.

2.5.5. The Widow of Zarephath

Scripture Reference: 1 Kings 17

The poor widow of Zarephath invested her life and gifts for the word of God. This is a very good example of God’s providence on those who invest their lives and God’s gifts for God’s plan of action. The widow of Zarephath was placed in a very unfavorable condition. She was not self-sufficient and she had nothing to offer to anybody. But she was blessed for becoming an instrument in God’s plan of action, offering herself, her son and her gifts for God’s glory. Alice Mathew suggests, “The next time you are tempted to ignore God’s word to you and do the self-protective thing, remember the widow of Zarephath.”²⁰ We may have to face the most testing time of faith, but we need to remember God’s promises to us.

Let us examine a few women of the New Testament, who have invested their lives and gifts for God’s plan of action.

¹⁹ Ruth 1:16-17 NASB.

²⁰ Mathews, *A Woman God Can Use*, 119.

2.6. Select Women Characters of the New Testament

2.6.1. Mary

Scripture Reference: Luke 1: 26-38

Our Lord's mother, Mary, will never be forgotten, for she became instrumental in Christ's coming into this world. Conception prior to marriage is a social disgrace in the Indian context and the unwed mother will be ostracized. One can very well comprehend the predicament of Mary when she conceives through the Holy Spirit, all eyes popping out at her, mouths twisting with gossip, and people abhorring her. Her conception does not conform to the societal mores. Thus Mary is placed in a very unfavorable condition. But she is called to invest her life and gifts in the redemption process of God. It is the redemption of the whole cosmos. Her readiness to invest her life and gifts was profitable in God's plan of action. Thelma Johnson, having spoken of her beautiful character filled with rare qualities, goes on to say, "Quiet, reticent, meditative, she possessed immense inner strength and courage to face the most unusual difficulties and the most painful situations in her life."²¹ This is the spiritual evolution required of a person who consecrates her life to the service of God in the most difficult of circumstances.

2.6.2. Elizabeth

Scripture Reference: Luke 1:5-25

Today we live in a world wherein people do not want children because either they have no time or do not want to be burdened by the responsibility of

²¹ E. Thelma Johnson, 92.

bringing up children. We here have a woman, Elizabeth, who was old and past the child-bearing age. She is placed in a very unfavorable circumstance. But God was opening an opportunity for her to invest in his plan of action. He gifts her with the rare privilege of becoming a mother in her old age. Elizabeth invests her life and gifts to become the mother of John the Baptist, who paves the way for her Lord.

2.6.3. Widow's Offering

Scripture Reference: Luke 21:1-4

This widow and her offering is an outstanding example of investing our gifts and ourselves totally to God's divine plan. Here the widow does not sit calculating what to save for herself and her future. She does not think what she will do if she gives away that entire amount she has. She willingly and readily invests herself and her belongings according to God's plan, making her the leader of the situation and also an example to all. That is why Paul's second letter to Corinthians (8:12) says, "For if the readiness is present, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have"²²

2.6.4. Prophetess Anna

Scripture Reference: Luke 2:36-38

Prophetess Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, became a widow at a very early age. She lived a widow until she was eighty-four. She had reached the span of which according to Psalmist is "labor and sorrow."²³ As a

²² 2 Corinthians 8:12 NASB.

²³ Psalm 90:10b NASB.

widow, she must have already had her share of struggles, resulting in bitterness and sorrow. But she had invested her life and her prophetic gifts according to God's plan. This made her life meaningful. Even in the evening of her life, she was blessed to see God's glory. She thanked God for the child, born to save the world. She spoke of the child to all those who anticipated the redemption of Jerusalem. Although her physical body was weak and declining, her inner strength helped her to find meaning in life. She gave importance to life of devotion, worship, prayer and fasting, day and night. She never ceased to do them. We can see the nurture and development of her spiritual life. Inspite of the unfavorable condition she was placed in, she could invest her life according to God's plan. This readiness and willingness made her the leader of the situation. Herbert Lockyer says, "Now she assumes another role. Old though she is, she goes forth to become a missionary."²⁴

2.6.5. Lydia

Scripture Reference: Acts 16:14-16

Lydia, a gentile woman, opened her heart to the gospel messages of Paul and was baptized. She also opened her home for the church meetings. She was a prominent business woman of Thyatira. But she wanted to invest her life and gifts in God's business. This made her an instrument in God's plan for his people. She and the members of her household found salvation.

All the above-mentioned women had to face adversity. But they were women who nurtured their spiritual lives, so as to be able to respond to God's

²⁴ Herbert Lockyer, 31.

call. They did not count the cost of the call. No human had to call them and bestow a favor by giving them a ministry, because that was not a professional call but a divine call. Moreover, their readiness to dedicate their lives and gifts according to God's plan, in unfavorable situations, became an opportunity for them to serve or minister according to God's plan. They became servant-leaders and also examples for generations to come. Nancy A Hardesty states, "The call of God often drew these women far beyond woman's sphere as prescribed by society, and gave them courage to answer their opponents."²⁵

Only a person who matures spiritually in the Lord can lead others to maturity in Christ. It is evident that one needs to be in right relationship with God, with fellow human being and with oneself to be a channel of grace. This will bring in change and growth in the church where we minister. The Church also must take cognizance of the spirit of changing times, accommodate and adapt accordingly, understand the needs of its flock and take measures that can nurture the spiritual growth of its flock, thereby ensuring its spiritual growth and strength. Or else the church will stagnate and die.

Alice Mathew's words as a support for these views are, "We can choose to let Him work through us wherever He has placed us. Or we can choose our own will, our own comfort, and our own convenience. The choice is ours."²⁶ But the consequence of the wise choice is different from the foolish one. As Alice

²⁵ Nancy A Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 108.

²⁶ Mathews, *A Woman God Can Use* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1990), 179

Mathews points out, "You will hear those thrilling words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant!"²⁷

When one is at peace with oneself, with others and with God, it helps God's servant to become a leader of the situation and the servant of her master Lord, in building the community and oneself for extension of God's kingdom. This in itself is profitable to God. It is not the quantity of the outcome of our involvement or extraordinary ability or gender that matters. For God can do wonders if one is open to be an instrument in His hands, no matter who opposes and however weak one may seem to be. As Tara Kela Barthel and Judy Dabler believe, "The ultimate relationship in our lives, our relationship with God, establishes our foundation for godly relationship with others and for peace within ourselves."²⁸

2.7. Ministry to the Aged for Empowering them to Light

Now, having set ourselves in right relationship with God, with the strong sense of the divine call, we can offer our unique gifts, our pastoral skills acquired and theological training as a servant leader, to minister to the elderly in India. Mary Marshall and Mary Dixon say, "With women making up two third of the old population, old age is clearly the women's issue for the next decade." If so, how do we minister?²⁹

²⁷ Mathews, *A Woman God Can Use*, 179.

²⁸ Ken Sande, foreward to *Peace Making Women: Biblical Hope for Resolving Conflict*, by Tara Kela Barthel and Judy Dabler (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 27.

²⁹ Mary Marshall and Mary Dixon, *Social work with the older people* (Hounds Mills: Macmillan press, 1996 ed.), 13.

Ruth is a good example of how we can minister to the aged. Although she does not see any future prospects for herself and her mother-in-law, well advanced in age, her commitment, accountability, and loyalty to family helped her to find her identity as the great grandmother of David and ancestress of Jesus, but she could bring meaning and joy to Naomi's life in her sunset years. Thus Ruth could minister to the elderly and helped Naomi die in peace in the Lord. Examples of the empowered aged women are Elizabeth, bearing fruit in her old age, and Anna's witness as prophetess with tremendous inner strength, even when she is well advanced in age; such are good biblical references of the elderly finding meaning in life. It also shows that God has no age barrier for His call. Even in the evening of our lives, we can invest our lives for God's glory. This is the theological basis on which we should empower our elderly in their sunset years. Henri Nouwen and Walter Gaffney challenge us to such a ministry by saying,

What seems the most frightening period of life, marked by excommunication and rejection, might turn into the most joyful opportunity to tell our community top from bottom. But who is the one who is going to call the elderly from their hiding places? Who is the one who will take their fear away and will take them out of the darkness of segregation, desolation, and loss of selfhood into the light which is prepared for all the nations to see?³⁰

Only a consecrated and dedicated service can lead them to light.

³⁰ Henri J M Nouwen and Walter J Gaffney, *Aging the Fulfillment of Life* (New York: Double Day, 1976), Image Books Edition, 86.

The ministry to the elderly is an opening, to which the writer feels a sense of calling. The physical condition of the elderly starts declining as they start aging and also their environment becomes very unfavorable to them, but they still can grow in Christ internally in their sunset years, finding meaning in their lives. God calls His servant to minister to them. When God presents this opportunity and wants one to minister, readiness to invest one's life and gifts in this plan of God will be profitable to the minister, to the people receiving the ministry and for God, because it will be a time of mutual growth of the inner-being of the elderly as well as the writer as a theologically trained woman and also the church.

Therefore, what does God require of a woman?: Her spiritual maturity in Christ, readiness to invest herself and her gifts according to God's plan amidst constraints and unfavorable conditions, her openness to see the unfavorable conditions as an opportunity to minister, and to set an example to the people she ministers.

What are the results of this investment?: Her readiness, unfavorable conditions and her example will become an opportunity for using pastoral skills acquired through learning, and enhance personal growth, opportunity for her to minister to the people and grow in the Lord, opportunity for her to exercise her call and gifts in action, opportunity to lead, serve as prophet, preacher, teacher, counselor, and leader in the given situation depending upon God given gifts and resources and finally, opportunity to accept God's call for greater responsibility.

2.8. Conclusion

God may call one to a very unfavorable condition like the women characters in the Old and the New Testament.³¹ However, as they choose to invest their lives and gifts according to God's plan, they can become a blessing not only to their family, community, and themselves, but also to God. The reward of such an investment will be a call to greater responsibility and God's acceptance of what we do. Despite the unwillingness of the church to offer ministry to the theologically trained woman, she can respond to God's divine call by investing her life and gifts according to God's direction. Women need not wait for the church to change but she can change by choice. The impact of this choice will change the church, and enable it to grow out of its stereotyped thinking. Thus, there is an opportunity for mutual growth through this project. The Biblical and theological basis for this that we have looked into is:

We have seen that there are lots of constraints for the writer to minister in Indian context. But as we looked into the biblical women of the Old Testament and New Testament we have seen that they also lived in a context that involved constraints of their particular culture and context. But it was their strong faith in God that made them go ahead with their calling and respond to the call creatively. Their spiritual nurturing and devout life helped them mature as individuals with exceptional qualities of self-control, self-sacrifice and wisdom. They disciplined their lives in obedience to the word of God and stood up for the cause they espoused with tremendous confidence in God's providence. They

³¹ Kenneth Barker, Donald Burdick, John Stek, Walter Wessel, Ronald Young Blood Ed., NIV Study Bible (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 1995) is used for the character study in addition to quotes from Nasb.

also possessed immense inner strength that helped them do things that others felt was impossible with them because the presence of God who makes impossible possible was with them.

The lives of the women characters of the Bible shows that age, gender or status are not barriers while responding to God's call and in being a part of His divine plan. Adversities only strengthened the resolve of these women to surmount the obstacles and serve the cause of the Lord. This is how God raised women and set them apart for the divine purpose through ages.

In the 21st century India, when women are competing with men in all fields and proving themselves better than their male counterparts it is strange that the theologically trained women are not recognized and acknowledged by the M.T.C. Yet the Theologically trained women are willing to be a part of the divine plan, ready to face the hardships and meet the challenges of the day because they sense the divine call of God to minister. So they surrender themselves to be molded into God's instruments. A theologically trained woman evolves spiritually through her seminary life, study of word of God and personal nurturing of spiritual life. This helps her to become obedient to the word of God and respond to it. She is ready to sacrifice herself and utilize her gifts for a common cause. She takes up the responsibility to advocate for her elderly people in need and equip them to a meaningful life in Christ. Her varied experiences of segregation and alienation that she faced in the church, as a theologically trained woman are a possibility for her to identifying herself with the problems of the elderly and develop a pattern of ministry that is suitable for them. Above all her commitment, her calling and

burden for the elderly make her go beyond constraints. Thus, she will definitely be an asset to the church to minister to the elderly in the light of the cultural and denominational realities of the Mar Thoma Church in 21st century India.

This chapter will be followed by literature review. Here is an insight into the work of the researchers on the elderly and their contributions in this field over the years.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, having dealt with the theological basis on which the writer attempts to plan to develop a ministry to the elderly, this chapter will deal with the literature review of the scholarly articles available on the subject. We need to keep in mind that very little research has been done on the predicament and problems of the elderly in India. In the Indian culture this stage in a person's life has received less priority than the other stages of life because the elderly as part of the joint family household were always assured of physical, emotional and economic support. However, with the gradual decline of the joint family system in India, the elderly find themselves orphaned and neglected. Anyone who chooses to embark on the task of ministering to the elderly should be acutely conscious of the problems of the elderly and sensitive to the needs of the aging population. Let us begin with the demographic trends of today.

3.2. Demographic Trends

Today as A.B. Bose points out, "The age structure of the population in both developed and developing countries unmistakably indicate a trend towards aging."¹

¹ A.B. Bose, "Aging in India: Demographic Dimensions," in *The Aging in India: Problems and Potentialities*, ed. A, B, Bose and K, D, Gangrade (New Delhi: Shakti Malik, 1988), 3.

The demographic transition commonly known as ‘greying of nations’ is posing a challenge to the entire world. It is estimated that there are 427 million persons above the age of 60, constituting 8.83% of the world’s total population. This global phenomenon of aging affects India too. The demographers identified India as a country that is entering the ‘age of aging’²

Jacob Cherian points out that “The demographic transition has been accompanied by a social and cultural transition, which is undermining the status and role of the elderly in the family as well as in the society.”³ This will affect the quality of life of the elderly. Therefore, this is an area of concern and poses a challenge to the church and to the Christian minister.

Before we look into the other aspects related to aging, let us examine what scholars have said about the terms “elderly” or “old age.”

3.3. Meaning and Definition of the Terms “Elderly” and “Aging”

3.3.1. Elderly and Aged

Devi and Bagga on their study “Aging in women in North-East India” found that “old age” or the “elderly” are terms that are frequently used both in popular usage and in the academic environment to identify older people.⁴ This usage,

2 K Srinivasan, 1998 “Demography and Reproductive Health” Lancet 351: 1274,Quoted in Jacob Cherian, “Need and Problems of the Elderly: A Challenge for Pastoral Ministry,” *Ministry and Spirituality: Contemporary Issues and Responses*, P.S Daniel, et al., eds. (Kottayam: Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, 2001), 182.

3 Jacob Cherian, “Needs and Problems of the Elderly: A Challenge for Pastoral Ministry” *Ministry and Spirituality: Contemporary Issues and Responses*, P.S Daniel, et al., eds. (Kottayam India: Mar Thoma Theological Seminary, 2001),182.

4 Indera P Singh, foreword, *Aging in Women: A Study in North-East India*, S. Dayabati Devi and Amrita Bagga (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2006), 1.

they found, depends upon the background of the user.⁵ Moving ahead with other sources we learn that Mahajan found it “difficult to define old age precisely because the term ‘old’ is used to describe persons of different ages depending on the circumstances and on the area of operation.”⁶ He goes ahead to question, “Does the term ‘old age’ conjure up images of frustration and pity; sickness and poverty; despair and senility or maturity and serenity; warmth and responsibility?”⁷

Both images are possibilities. However, one can change to another depending on the condition in which the elderly live, besides the inherent factors in the aging process. Sinikka, explaining how the term is used, misused, and yet, for its relevance in society says,

Aging is an integral part of the human condition. It is perhaps because of its phenomenological, taken for granted nature, that theorists have over-looked the need to define ‘old’, ‘elderly’, more rigorously. Even grammatically, it is incorrect to speak of ‘older people’ without defining ‘older than whom’, yet, it is done all the time. Although there is no universally accepted age threshold at which people are labeled ‘old’, societal age norms do, in fact, exist.⁸

5 S. Dayabati Devi, and Amrita Bagga, 1.

6 P.N. Mohanty, Ram Singh and Ms Arinima, *Problems of the Aged in Unorganised Sector*, A. Mahajan (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987), 3.

7 A. Mahajan, 1.

8 A.L. Sinikka Dixon, *Cross-Culturally Comparative Structural Constraints Affecting the Social Aspects of Aging: Aging and Human Development in Global Perspective*, ed. Ishwar Modi (Jaipur: Rawat Publication, 2001), 11.

The complexities of the word notwithstanding, we will use the terms interchangeably throughout the thesis as that concerning a section of people, who needs attention and care for their condition and wellbeing.

3.3.2. Definition of Aging

Jacob Cherian says, "Generally, aging is defined as occurring at three levels: biological aging, psychological aging and sociological aging."⁹ They are related to body structure and function at a biological level, adaptive capacities, behavior and attitudes at a psychological level, and finally social roles, behavior and expectations at a sociological level with functional age including the three.¹⁰

J. Maurus says, "Psychologists and gerontologists have different ways of telling the age of each person: the chronological age, which is determined by the number of years he has lived; the biological age, which is determined by the condition and state of his body; and finally, the psychological age which is measured by how old a person feels and acts."¹¹

So it is obvious that aging is a "multi-dimensional process"¹² that can be discussed at biological, social and psychological levels for the purpose of understanding.¹³ Mahajan, Pyrek and Snyder have shared the same view that "Literature on aging suggests that the problems associated with the aged are the

⁹ Jacob Cherian, 184.

¹⁰ Jacob Cherian, 184.

¹¹ P.D. Tandon, foreword, *Grow Old Gracefully*, J. Maurus (Bombay: Better Yourself Books, 1995), 24.

¹² A. Mahajan, 1.

¹³ A. Mahajan, 1.

outcome of physical, psychological, social, religious, environmental, and cultural factors.”¹⁴ To think of the elderly as a “homogeneous group” is fallacious, for their problems vary and therefore warrants being scrutinized under financial, health and socio-psychological headings.¹⁵ This could be precisely why Gary Collins forewarns us on the danger of assuming that “later years are always plagued by problems.”¹⁶

Let us look into the various problems of the aged, inherent and super-imposed.

3.4. Problems and Needs of the Aged

In the Indian context, the family as a close-knit unit provided for the “economic, psychological and social needs of its members,”¹⁷ especially of the elderly. However, as a result of tremendous strides made in the field of technology, India witnessed a drastic change in its societal make-up. While the quality of life improved dramatically for the younger generation, the weak, the old and the sick fell victims to change and were left to fend for themselves. They remained at the mercy of the state government.¹⁸ Therefore, it is mandatory that

¹⁴ J.Pyrek and L.H.Snyder. 1978. “The human development inventory: a measuring instrument with programmatic implications.” A. Mahajan, 3.

¹⁵ K.G. Desai, 47.

¹⁶ Gary R.Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), 214.

¹⁷ A. Mahajan, 27.

¹⁸ A. Mahajan, 27.

we understand the problems and needs of the elderly, before exploring the possibility of developing a plan to minister to the elderly.

3.4.1. Problems and Needs in Relation to Physical Factors

It is a biological fact that with the decline of health and vigor, the elderly experience difficulty in carrying out day-to-day activities, so comments Desai.¹⁹ "Biological aging and poor economic conditions affect the physical health of older people. The biological aging process decreases their activity and physical strength, and poor economic conditions aggravates the poor health of aged persons."²⁰ Their lives get restricted. Commuting becomes a problem. Long waiting at public places to get things done makes them impatient, tired and miserable. Economic and biological factors contribute to their nutrition deficiency. They lose confidence in their own abilities. Lack of physical strength and energy leaves them susceptible to diseases.²¹ Jacob Cherian states the problem of the aged thus:

- ▶ Problem of self-acceptance of aging process
- ▶ Problem due to preoccupation with diseases
- ▶ Problem due to increased dependency
- ▶ Problem with regard to management of household chores.²²

A person's well-being depends on his or her health. But as we have seen, there are various factors that are not conducive to the physical well-being of the

¹⁹ K.G. Desai, 47.

²⁰ A. Mahajan, 36.

²¹ K.G. Desai, 47.

²² Jacob Cherian, 188.

aged. It is therefore of prime importance that the elderly reconcile themselves to the aging process besides making an effort to remain healthy.

3.4.2. Problems and Needs in Relation to Psychological Factors

"The psychological problems faced by the elderly can be a matter of great concern. Failing health, continuing ailment, poor financial situation and humiliation in the family can all add up to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, depression and anxiety."²³ As Desai, Dayabati and Amrita have found, "Women are known to be more prone to emotional and social isolation."²⁴ They have further explored from their study that,

With the advent of old age and retirement from active socio-economic life an individual starts feeling neglected and deprived of social participation. Life span change and adaptation are the leading issues at this stage. Stress and strain that come out of their inability to participate develop into either emotional instability or make them stoic. Hence the emotional and attitudinal aspects in this regard may be treated as psychological problems.²⁵

Henri and Gaffney examined "segregation, desolation and loss of self"²⁶ as the three factors for the elderly feeling "ostracized". They are considered the "three forms of rejection: rejection by society, rejection by friends, and rejection

²³ K.G.Desai, 48.

²⁴ S. Dayabati Devi, and Amrita Bagga, 16.

²⁵ S. Dayanati Devi, and Amrita Bagga, 14.

²⁶ Henri J. M. Nouwen and Walter J. Gaffney, *Aging: the Fulfillment of Life*, rev. ed. (New York: Image Books, 1976), 29.

by our inner self.”²⁷ Jacob Cherian sums up the psychological problems and needs thus:

- ▶ Need for the integration of various losses (loss of health, loss of identity, loss of power, loss of independence, loss of spouse, loss in the level of income, etc.)
- ▶ Anxiety of spouse’s and one’s own death
- ▶ Worry about unfinished tasks
- ▶ Anxiety related to the future and settlement of children
- ▶ Anxiety of becoming a burden on other members of the family
- ▶ Grief related to bereavement and extended separation of children²⁸

3.4.3. Problems and Needs in Relation to Socio-Cultural Factors

Mahajan’s study on psycho-social problems of the aged shows the impact of social factors on the life of the elders. He reports.

Displacement of folk knowledge with the scientific knowledge in the modern society has lowered their status to such an extent that economically inactive and old persons is treated as a burden on the limited resources of the family. Such a situation has created a feeling of neglect, dependency, loneliness, powerlessness, and meaninglessness among the poor old persons.²⁹

Archan points out, “Strangely enough, several socio-cultural factors that pose hurdles in harmonious adjustment of the aged can be best understood in the background of the past traditions.”³⁰ She, in her study on elderly women,

27 Henri J. M. Nouwen and Walter J. Gaffney, 29.

28 Jacob Cherian, 188

29 A.Mahajan, 40.

30 Archana Kaushik Panda, *Elderly Women in Megapolis* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2005), 17.

quotes Sen as a support to her view, and points out, “the roots of vulnerability in later life have, often, related to a lifetime of gender-based economic, social, and cultural inequalities where social roles combined with differential opportunity structures available to men and women have their effect.”³¹

Dayabati and Amrita in their study of aging in women found that “Some socio-cultural factors such as marital status of older women, their economic conditions, living arrangements, etc., are important factors affecting their quality of life in old age.”³² Mahajan through his study claims, “Though fulfillment of basic needs is essential for the survival of mankind yet man as a social being, does not live by bread alone. He wants to live in the society where he gets the feeling of belongingness.”³³

Thus, we see that for the elderly there is a need for belonging, acceptance, self esteem and the need to love and to be loved.

3.4.4. Problems and Needs in Relation to Environmental Factors

Environmental factors and aging are closely related. A hostile environment can bring additional burden in the life of the elderly. Climatic conditions, migration, or unfamiliar atmosphere heighten the problem of the elderly. Besides, the migration of youth in pursuit of greener pastures, living arrangements, loss of

31 Kasthuri Sen, (1994), “Women and Ageing In Ramachandran”, C.R and Shah,Bela eds., Public Health Implications of Ageing in India, (New Delhi: Indian Council of Medical Research),183-184, Archana Kaushik Panda, *Elderly Women in Megapolis* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2005), 19.

32 S. Dayabati Devi, and Amrita Bagga, 16-17.

33 A. Mahajan, 40.

spouse, indifferent surroundings, loss of roles also contribute to the problems of the elderly. Therefore, the need for a friendly environment is essential.³⁴

3.4.5. Problems and Needs in Relation to Economic Factors

Archana found that economic security is an important variable influencing the well-being of the senior citizens.³⁵ Dayabati and Amrita establish the truth that the economic factor is an important determinant of adjustment and life satisfaction of the elders.³⁶ Mahajan goes a step forward to explain that education, occupation and income determine the economic status of a person in the society. His findings show that persons dependent on lower occupations bring in very little remuneration, resulting in dependency on government for survival when they become physically unfit.³⁷ Kirpal Singh reports “Retirement from employment also brings in the problem of adjustment to a sharp decline in income, to a loss in status and to the availability of increased unscheduled time. Generally there is no smooth change-over from occupation engagement to retirement”.³⁸ Thus, there is a need for financial security for a contented life.

3.4.6. Problems and Needs in Relation to Spiritual Factors

Maurus says, “Old age is a tremendous opportunity for drawing nearer to God, indeed that may well be its main purpose. Healthy reading, meditation and

³⁴ S. Dayabati Devi and Amrita Bagga, 19-20.

³⁵ Archana Kaushik Panda, 24.

³⁶ A. Dayabati Devi, and Amrita Bagga, 18-19.

³⁷ A.Mahajan, 21.

³⁸ Saiyid Zafar Hasan, foreword to *Aging in India*, by Kirpal Singh Soodan (Lucknow: Minerva associates 1975), 84.

prayer will serve the purpose. This will help you to be in communication with God the master of your life.” But, the reality of life, death, life after death creeps in with the process of aging and brings in fear, uncertainty, guilt and sense of failure.³⁹ Kurian, pointing to the old people who struggle to understand their existence in this world of suffering says, “They see no meaning for their continued existence. Therefore there is a certain poignancy about their questions.”⁴⁰ This dynamic, thus, points to their spiritual need of finding “meaning and significance for their lives.”⁴¹

All the above factors contribute to the problems of the elderly, creating a need for medical facilities, personal adjustment, financial security, living arrangements, acceptance, self esteem, a friendly environment and meaning in life. Kurian sums up the needs of the elderly as “need for love, fellowship, comfort and hope of eternal life.”⁴²

In these unfavorable conditions, the elderly need to be empowered to use their potential. As Saxena, says, the aged should not be looked as a “problem” but also as a “precious resource, which can be harnessed for promoting the

39 Gary R Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), 218.

40 V.T. Kurian, *An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, ed. T.V Philip (Bangalore: Christian Students' Library, 1970), 104.

41 V.T. Kurian, 104.

42 V.T. Kurian, 104.

economic and social development of the community. There is need to tap this resource in a systematic manner, particularly for tasks of nation building."⁴³

3.5. Potential of the Aged

S.C. Dutta, on the potential of the aged says, "They are no longer a burden on society but are reservoirs of experience and skills with the desire to continue to be useful. Both for national welfare and for the good of the aged, it is necessary to utilize their experience, skills and expertise."⁴⁴

D.N. Saxena says, The most precious asset which the aged possess in an ample measure is their vast reservoir of accumulated knowledge and experience. As long as the health and mental faculties of the aged do not deteriorate, they can make an extremely valuable contribution to the economic and social development of society, and in developing a sense of good citizenship in the community.⁴⁵

R.S. Srivastava, says, "The aged constitute an important resource which many nations are grossly under-utilizing at present. There is hardly any economic prudence for a nation to first invest to enable people to live longer in good health, and thereafter not utilize their capabilities."⁴⁶

43 D.N. Saxena, "Senior Citizens: Their Problems and Potentialities," *The Aging in India: Problems and Potentialities*, (New Delhi: Shakti Malik), 97.

44 S.C. Dutta, "Senior Citizens and Their Contribution to Citizenship Development," *The Aging in India: Problems and Potentialities*, ed. A. Bose and K. D. Gangrade (New Delhi: Shakti Malik, 1988), 104.

45 D.N. Saxena, "Senior Citizens; Their Problems and Potentialities," *The Aging In India: Problems and Potentialities*, ed. Bose and Gangrade (New Delhi: Shakti Malik, 1988), 97.

46 R.S. Srivastava, "Service Centres For The Aging," *The Aging in India: Problems and Potentialities*, ed., Bose and Gangerade (New Delhi: Shakti Malik, 1988), 113-114.

K.S. Hoskot, says, "Thus the wisdom and experience of the old could be combined with the energy and enthusiasm of the young to build a new world order, where all the members of the human family can live in wholesome harmony."⁴⁷ Literature thus reveals that the aged are precious, useful resources, whose wisdom and experience need to be utilized for their well-being and for those around them.

3.6. Relevance of Ministry to the Aged

We have seen that the needs of the aged have "multi-dimensional"⁴⁸ factors associated with them. Therefore caring can be a challenge. Family care for the aged is "the expected norm"⁴⁹ but this has become a concern with the change in the traditional pattern of family set up, and other modern life constraints that "generate stresses on the bonds of inter-generational togetherness."⁵⁰ Yet, their emotional attachment does not allow them to stay elsewhere.⁵¹ However, even if the family has enough financial resources, unless they have the skills or emotional resources they will not be able to care for the elderly, thereby making the situation unpleasant to the giver and the receiver.⁵²

⁴⁷ K.S. Hoskot, "New Roles For Old Folks," *The Aging in India: Problems and Potentialities*, ed. Bose and Gangrade (New Delhi: Shakti Malik, 1988), 120.

⁴⁸ A. Mahajan, 1.

⁴⁹ K.D.Gangerade, "Crisis of Values": A Sociological Study of The Old and The Young," *The Aging in India: Problems and Potentialities*, ed. Bose and Gangrade (New Delhi: Shakti Malik, 1988), 35.

⁵⁰ K.D. Gangrade, 35.

⁵¹ K.D. Gangrade, 34.

⁵² V.T. Kurian, 103.

This calls for support from secular institutions and organizations in the service of the aged. But India does not "yet have a more purposefully directed and well organized programs and agencies or institutions where such programs could be carried out."⁵³

To such situation comes the task of a Christian minister. According to Barron,

Religion's gerontological task is essentially four fold:

- To help face impending death;
- To help find and maintain a sense of meaningfulness and significance in life;
- To help accept the inevitable losses of old age;
- To help discover and utilize the compensatory values that are potential in old age.⁵⁴

However, as Kurian says, "The church and society should find ways and means by which the aged can be helped to find meaning and significance for their lives."⁵⁵ The elderly has potential that can be utilized in its best possible way creatively for growth in oneself, in the community, and in relationship to the Lord. Empowering the aged to the fourfold task is the call of a servant of God here. Empowering them helps in empowerment of oneself. There is a mutual empowerment. This will help them find meaning and significance for their lives.

Women have always been the caregiver to the aged at their own homes. "Traditionally, caring for an aging relative has been done by women, and that

⁵³ Saiyid Zafar Hasan, foreword to *Aging in India*, by Kirpal Singal Soodan (Lucknow: Minerva Associates, 1975), 169.

⁵⁴ Barron Milton, *The Aging American: An Introduction to Social Gerontology and Geriatrics* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1961), 166.

⁵⁵ V.T. Kurian, *An Introduction to Pastoral Counseling*, 104.

isn't changing.”⁵⁶ But the role of God in the life of the caregiver and receiver is of prime importance. Kirpal Singh speaking on the role of religion on the aged says,

The belief in God as the Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of life has been the conviction of many religions. It is said to provide the basis for meeting some of the spiritual needs in old age such as relief from heightened emotions of guilt, grief and fear, relief from pangs of loneliness, a secure life after death, a feeling of continuing usefulness, an assurance of God's continuing love, and to accept the inevitable (death included) happenings with dignity.⁵⁷

R.S. Srivastava concludes his survey with the finding of a need for “an integrated service centre for the aging.”⁵⁸

The psycho-social, physical and economic needs of the aged and the relevance of ministry to the aged is very evident from the literature review. Therefore, there is a call for a theologically trained woman to empower elderly people in need. How she plans to design the task is the next question.

3.7. Conclusion

The growing population of the elderly is a reality, but the knowledge of the magnitude of the problems of the aged is limited because there has not been much research done in this area. However, the fact remains that it is no longer possible to ignore this reality.

⁵⁶ Ron Delbene with Mary and Herb Montgomery, *Times of Change, Times of Challenge: When an Aging Loved One Needs Care* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1991), 8.

⁵⁷ Kripal Singh Soodan, *Aging in India*, 135.

⁵⁸ R.S. Srivastava, *Service for the Aging*, 116.

The problems that confront the aged vary from person to person and are largely dependent on their socio-economic background. The physical, psychological, social, spiritual, cultural and environmental factors also impact the lives of the aged. Therefore, to care for the elderly, the knowledge of their needs, problems and potential is essential. Besides, the aged need to accept and adapt to their infirmity and debility. But the lack of initiative of the aged to help themselves develop organized caring services and centers calls us to minister to them and empowering them to find light in the sunset days of their lives. Thus, we can enable them to find meaning and purpose in their lives and mold them to be useful instruments for God until they breathe their last. How to design the plan to minister to the aged is the next task of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

4.1. Introduction

This chapter is the project design undertaken for study, which is the development of a ministry for the elderly. The bases of the needs of the elderly are multi-dimensional. Consequently, a need for setting up a center for an integrated ministry for the aged becomes essential. This center aims at using the potential of the aged to help them to look at oneself, beyond oneself, at others and at God. This will be a diversified ministry and it aspires to empower the elderly and assist them in finding meaning and sense of purpose in their sunset years as well as help them die in the peace of the Lord. But before looking directly into the health, psycho-social, economic, cultural and environmental needs of the aged, let us examine the physical, legal, financial and environmental aspects of establishing the proposed center for carrying out the ministry.

4.2. Initial Formalities and Process of Obtaining a Day-Care Center

4.2.1. The Location of the Day-Care Center

The day-care center needs to be located in at least a five-hectare parcel of land, away from the din and clamor of the city, but at the same time easily accessible to the elderly. This is so because a serene environment is essential for the well-being of the elderly. Some of the elderly will be senile as a consequence of their old age. They will have a very low level of tolerance to the din and noises around because noises can agitate them easily. They

need a calm and quiet place, wherein they can rest and meditate in peace. Hence the day-care center should be located away from the din and clamor of the city.

To begin with, a double-storied building on lease is sufficient to start a day-care center but in the long run, a five-hectare parcel of land will be very helpful for establishing a permanent and independent structure for a project offering multi-dimensional services. A large area can meet the spatial requirements of all the service-providing units of the day-care center. All these units can be housed on the ground floor. This will maximize the easy accessibility of the services by the elderly. The elderly in wheel chairs and those dependent on walking frames will have free space to move. In addition, large spaces can be allocated for garden, parks and play-grounds. It is hoped that the concept of an integrated ministry for the aged will evoke a positive response and commitment from the community. It would be an advantage to the project undertaken if a member of the community or a philanthropist could make a substantial contribution to the cause of the ministry by donating a piece of land for the establishment of the day-care center.

After the land is acquired, legal sanction in accordance with the existing norms of the state will be obtained, after which a suitable name that neither offends nor discourages the elderly will be assigned to the center. Thereafter, means and ways of mobilizing resources and raising the required capital for the construction of the building will be explored.

4.2.2. Building Fund

A building fund account will be opened. Besides philanthropists, private and government agencies will be approached for securing financial support to this project.

4.2.3. The Structure of the Proposed Building

The structure of the building will be so designed as to meet the multi-dimensional needs of the elderly. The schematic form of the proposed building will be based on the functional and aesthetic requirements of its members. It envisions a medical unit, a community unit, a counseling unit, a financial department, an administrative block, a social work unit and an advisory unit.

4.2.4. Infrastructure

The premises of the building will have well-maintained lawns and gardens that will ensure a cool and soothing ambience. Separate parking lots for the staff and the elderly visiting the center will be created. Trash-cans at strategic points in the premises will keep the campus clean and tidy. The reception unit will guide and direct the elderly to the respective units of the center.

4.2.5. Interior Design

The building will be designed to facilitate the easy mobility of the elderly. The spaces inside will be contrived with the intention of creating and enhancing the mood of peace, serenity and tranquility.

The day-care center will be well equipped with adequate infrastructural facilities beginning with telephones, computers, and intercoms placed in all the units. A medical unit with diagnostic services besides a first-aid and an emergency unit for immediate care will be set up.

A community unit with library facilities, a room for personal interaction and social gathering, a chapel for worship, singing, preaching and bible study, recreational facilities like TV, radio, indoor and out door games, and an auditorium for staging and engaging in cultural programs will be given shape. The elderly visiting the day-care center will be provided with meals. Therefore, a well maintained dining facility will need to be constructed and equipped.

A social work unit to cater to the needs of those who need help with information regarding social work will be made available. And, a baby-sitting facility will be provided to take care of the grandchildren accompanying the elderly to the center.

4.2.6. Staff

Dedicated and well-qualified staff will be appointed to attend to the needs of each unit. The medical unit will have doctors specialized in gerontology and qualified nurses. The counseling unit will have trained counselors. The theologically trained women will offer counseling services to the elderly and extend their active support to all the service-providing units of the day-care center. They will preach, teach, lead bible-study, plan activities, assign duties to the staff, and conduct conferences and retreats. However,

they will not administer the sacraments, as they are not ordained priests. Thus, theologically trained women will play a very significant and meaningful role in the administrative set-up of the day-care center. In addition the skilled elderly, like doctors, preachers and teachers, willing to serve will be given an opportunity to offer their services to the day-care center.

Therefore, this day-care center will meet its manpower requirement for its various units from among the elderly too. This will ensure their participation and boost their self-worth. Thus the elderly have an opportunity to make use of their potentials creatively and the remuneration they get for their services to the center will make them self-reliant to some extent.

4.2.7. Financial and Employment Unit

This unit will work to mobilize resources to run the center. Further, the free will subscription of the elderly will augment the capital. Employment guidance will be provided to those who would like to work after retirement. The elderly will also receive financial support during times of crisis.

4.2.8. Advisory Unit

The day-care center will advise and guide the elderly regarding pension schemes, health insurance plans available and provide information on various services and facilities provided by the government for its senior citizens. Also, advice from experts and professionals on health, finance and law will help the elderly address their problems with confidence.

4.2.9. Administration of the Center

The persons representing each unit will form the executive committee of the center. Besides the directors and the board of directors, the executive committee will plan the running of the center. They will conceptualize and execute the programs in co-ordination with all the units. This means that the administrative setup will have pastors, doctors, counselors, social workers and others as its members. Most of them will be people who have retired from their respective services but are still healthy and fit to work. With these initial investments in financial and human resources for the establishment and administration of the center, we can move to meet the needs of the elderly after inaugurating the center.

4.3. Inauguration of the Day-Care Center

The activities of the center will commence with the inaugural worship and preaching followed by Holy Communion. For the inaugural meeting, local community and dignitaries from various fields will be invited. During the meeting, there will be a presentation of the aims, the objectives and the goals of the center. The inaugural address will reiterate the aims, the goals and the objectives of the center. Every unit of the center will be declared open on the day and the services of the unit will be offered to the elderly. For example, there will be a general medical checkup of the elderly in the medical unit, counseling in the counseling unit, and social interaction and recreation in the community unit. They will get information on employment opportunities and guidance on financial matters in the finance department.

4.4. Integrated Ministry in Collaboration with Each Unit Helping to Meet the Needs of the Elderly

4.4.1. The Medical Unit and the Health Needs of the Aged

Specialists and doctors in the field of medicine will attend to the health needs of the elderly. They will examine them, conduct the required tests to detect abnormalities, if any, and help the elderly keep fit through precautionary and preventive measures and early diagnosis. Regular exercises and normal walks will be encouraged. Those unable to buy spectacles and hearing aids and such other necessities will get financial assistance to obtain them. The center will help the elderly secure loans from the government to meet the cost of any other expensive aids that they may require. The doctors will advise and provide information with regard to the advanced medical services necessary and available at various hospitals. They will also counsel the elderly on the nutritional aspects of their diet. The elderly visiting the center will be provided meals.

4.4.2. The Psychological Needs of the Aged and the Counseling Unit

We have seen that the elderly have various psychological needs. The main purpose of the unit is to give them the necessary fellowship and support. The counseling unit will help the elderly adjust to the aging process and face the reality of this stage of life. Their various psychological problems will be dealt through the counseling sessions. Their feeling of segregation, desolation and loss of self-worth and the resultant anxiety, worry and grief will be dealt with and addressed by the counseling unit. They will be encouraged

to reconcile to the reality of various losses they face in the aging process.

Those with serious psychosomatic disorders will be referred to psychologists and psychiatrists. The elderly will be helped to harness the potential inherent in them and those acquired through education and experience for various activities of the center, thus enabling them to utilize leisure creatively. Their participation in the activities of the center will meet their need for companionship and the need for involvement and control. This will also encourage a positive outlook and infuse in them a sense of optimism.

4.4.3. The Socio-Religious and the Recreational Needs of the Aged and the Community Unit

This unit will deal with the social factors, religion and recreation. There will be an opportunity for the elderly to exercise power, increase their status by assigning them roles and responsibilities in the center. There will be ample opportunities for their social interaction, especially with their peers. They will be able to share their rich experiences of the past with one another. Thus, the center will work to remove feelings of neglect, dependency, loneliness, powerlessness, and meaninglessness among the elderly.

Religion is of prime importance to the aged. At the center, the elderly will find time and opportunity for meditation, prayer, and singing. Through preaching, teaching and counseling, the center will help the aged in understanding the realities of life and death. Spiritual nurture and sacramental life will be emphasized. This will help the elderly attain inner strength, despite their physical decline, to live happily and age gracefully.

The center will assign responsibilities and roles to the elderly according to the gifts they possess. Various committees like the food committee, social work committee, cultural program committee and worship committee will provide services to the elders and it will also be an opportunity for them to serve. The elderly will be involved in these committees, so that they will regain the sense of responsibility and belonging. The center will send the elderly interested in social work to interact with those unable to come to the center and provide them with tangible emotional support through prayer and fellowship.

The transport service of the center will make arrangements to bring the elderly to the center. Cultural programs, TV programs and indoor and outdoor games will entertain the elderly and relieve their tedium. The library will provide them with books and newspapers for reading. Those with talent in music will handle the choir and singing sessions. The elderly will manage the dining service and its functioning so as to creatively use their time. Thus, the involvement of the elderly in the functioning of the various units will help in equipping the elders with a sense of self-worth, dignity and usefulness.

4.5. Application of the Pastoral Skills to Minister to the Aged in the 21st century

4.5.1. Preaching Skills

The word of God is a powerful weapon for spiritual transformation. So, as expository preacher, I will try to provide spiritual support to the elderly through proclaiming biblical truths. The elderly will draw spiritual sustenance

from every message preached. There is an encounter between God and the elderly through the message. The sermons preached will help the elderly understand that prolonged life is a blessing, resulting from obedience to God's statutes and commandments. They will also realize that the righteous and the devout will not die without seeing the glory of God and to such, life and death is like sleep and wakening to a life with Christ. The sermons delivered will help the elderly radiate the hope of eternal life. Thus they will draw spiritual sustenance and strength through the word of God. The sermons will also underscore their value and importance in God's scheme of things and the need for the use of their skill for the well being of their fellowmen. Therefore, the preacher will attempt to preach keeping in mind the audience, the context, the need of the center and that of the elderly.

In view of the physical vulnerability of the elderly, especially when their faculties of sight and hearing are on the wane, effective communication tools such as gestures, eye contact, voice modulation, pitch, punch, progress and pause will be used to drive the message home.

Feed-back sessions from the elderly to assess the preacher's performance will encourage their keen participation and involvement. They can assess the sermon with wisdom obtained through their vast experiences and learning.

Preaching thus will be a time of interaction between God, the hearer, the preacher, and the elderly listener. It will be a time of spiritual nurturing and

growth. There is a spiritual direction in the whole process of preaching, hearing and feedback.

4.5.2. Counseling Skills

The counselor, as the messenger of the new covenant, will guide, nurture, and provide the elderly with healing support and help in their reconciliation and growth. A comprehensive view of the cultural context and background of the elderly member will be taken into consideration for providing help. The issues of the elderly will need a genuine, and an honest and well-balanced approach. The communication skills of listening, insight, empathy, engaging and responding will help in the process. As we have seen in the second chapter, the purpose of the ministry to the aged is to empower them. Therefore, through the counseling process, there is an attempt to empower the aged and bolster their well-being.

Egan's skilled helper model will be used to deal with the elderly clients. Egan's "Skilled Helper Model"¹ is a 3-stage model or framework offered by Egan Gerard. It is used to help the elderly solve their problems and develop opportunities. The goal is to help the elderly resolve their problems, helping them to help themselves and developing unused opportunities fully. This model lays emphasis on empowerment. This model helps to move the person towards action resulting in outcomes they themselves choose and value. As a model, it is useful because it deals with the issues and the problems

¹ Gerard Egan, *The Skilled Helper: A Problem-Management and opportunity-Development Approach to Helping* 7th ed.(Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole,2002),24.

encountered by the elderly client in the recent past and in the present. It is helpful to the elderly as their problems are the result of the aging process and the resultant effects of the changes in societal make-up and the demographic transition.

This model is flexible enough to accommodate and meet the needs of the elderly client. The approach of the counselor's genuineness, respect, empathy, and principles of good listening throughout the process are to the advantage of the elderly counselee. Therefore, it is a good model to use.

The Egan Model helps the elderly to address three questions, although all the three need not be addressed by everyone. However, the counselor may use all or any of the stages, shift the stance upward or downward as determined by the needs of the case. The three questions are as follows:

- What is going on?
- What do I want instead?
- How might I get to what I want?²

4.5.2.1. Stage 1: Current State of Affairs

The elderly have many stories to tell and this would be the best and safe place to tell their story in their own and best way. The counselor, as a good listener, will fully hear and acknowledge it. This will help them to have a

² G. Egan's Skilled Helper Model, www.gp-training.net/training/mentoring/egan.htm, Accessed October 7, 2007.

broader view of the problem and see it in the right perspectives. They will also find out the juncture at which they need to move forward with hope.

Step 1-A: The Story. The skilled counselor or helper, by using the active listening skills will help the elderly unveil their story, explore and reflect on the same. For some, this is enough, but for others, it is just the beginning. The skills used in this stage are active listening, reflecting, paraphrasing, checking, understanding, open questioning, and summarizing. This process of story telling and listening will be interspersed with appropriate questions, to achieve the desirable end.

Step 1-B: Blind spots. The elderly story-teller is unable to see blind spots that prevent them from active living. The skilled counselor helps them to see the blind spots as well as the potential in them, thus adding a new perspective to move forward. The skills used to achieve this purpose are challenging. The elderly are helped to perceive the different perspectives, the specifics, the blind spots, the weaknesses and the strengths of the issues involved, by appropriate questioning. This exercise will enable them to move forward.

Step 1-C: Focusing on the right problems and moving forward. The elderly have many problems like loss of self-worth, post retirement issues, loneliness due to the migration of their grown-up children, and a feeling of segregation, desolation and self-loss. They find difficulty in adapting to the modern outlook. They feel stuck and immobile. We will help them focus on their specific problem. We will encourage them to adapt and reconcile to the

changes and the problems associated with aging and mitigate their distress. This will improve their quality of life and help them get on in life, with the least discomfort. For example, the key place is to get started with one's relationship with one's family. The skills used are facilitating, focusing and prioritizing an area that needs to be worked on. Appropriate questions like the following will be asked in the helping process. "What would be best to work on now? What is manageable?"

At this point, this may be sometimes just what one needs. We can move forward depending on the need of the case to stage two.

4.5.2.2. Stage 2: The Preferred Scenario

At this stage, the elderly will have to deal with other questions: What do I want? What do I need? Do I need it at the moment? In addition, what would it be, if it were better? Is a bit better enough? This stage helps in generating energy and hope.

Step 2-A: Possibilities for a better future. Working for possibilities for a better future, helps the elderly understand their problems better. When they reflect on the practicalities, it will lead them to a better understanding of their issue.

Step 2-B: The Change Agenda. The elderly will be helped to choose realistic and challenging goals to manage the key problem already identified. The priorities are set for themselves. The changed agenda of the elderly includes mending their relationships with their children, changing in their outlook, getting involved and interacting with the community using their

interpersonal skills. This helps them get back their lost power and status and results in a healthy and positive outlook in life.

Step 2-C: Commitment. We will help the client or the elderly find incentives to encourage them to remain committed to the identified goal and persist with what they need and want, until they realize it.

4.5.2.3. Stage 3: Strategies for Action

This stage works to accomplish the needs of the elderly by translating the priorities into problem-managing accomplishment. This stage is a quest of the elderly, answering the question How do I get there?

Step 3-A: Possible Actions. The elderly will be helped to see that there are many different ways of achieving their goals rather than take hasty unsuccessful ways of achieving the goals. This will help them with possible routes to the goal. Appropriate questions will be asked to facilitate brainstorming.

Step 3-B: Focusing on Appropriate Strategies. We will help the elderly to focus on the strategy that best suits their personality, talents, style and temperament. This will involve breaking out of old mind-sets and from ridiculous ideas. Here again, appropriate questions that facilitate the selection of the right strategy will be asked.

Step 3-C: Moving to Action. We will help the elderly plan the next step. The elderly will shape their own action plan. These plans must be simple and practical, leading to success. The feedback and the follow-up will determine the efficacy of the plan in achieving their goal. If the desired goal is not

reached, we can return to stage one of the skilled helper model. This will help in keeping their agenda specific, achievable and realistic. Thus, the elderly will be assisted to empower themselves.³

4.5.3. Leadership Skills

Leadership skills are a must for the growth and stability of the center and the ministry to the elderly. Like the good shepherd, the leader should have a burden for his people, search for resources and be eager to minister. As already discussed in the second chapter, the leader should nurture one's own spirituality to consecrate oneselfs for the noble cause. Let us look into some of the leadership skills that will help in ministering the elderly.

4.5.3.1. Leading

The ministry to the elderly is a very challenging one. The strength and the growth of the ministry depends on the competence and efficiency of its leader. We are now convinced that the elderly have great potential, which needs to be utilized for the common good and for their well-being. Therefore, the leader will try to create a state of mind that will enable the elderly to realize this aspect of their personality by leading them to utilize their potential. We will get them to do it, as we are convinced, that it should be done. We will lead them to behave in a desired way, as God wants them to.

³ G. Egan's Skilled Helper Model, www.gp-training.net/training/mentoring/egan.htm, Accessed October 7, 2007.

4.5.3.2. Decision-making

There are ample situations when we need to make quick decisions in ministering to the elderly. It could be an unexpected deterioration of the health of a member or any other critical situation, where decision-making skills are called for in addressing the crisis.

4.5.3.3. Motivating

The elderly will be motivated to take up manageable roles in the center. They can be social workers of the center. External pressures like the demographic transitional change in the family setup, the migration of children in search of greener pastures, and the social outlook towards the aged have all contributed to passivity and a premature social death in the elderly. The center and its leader will motivate the elderly to action and active living through participation in the activities of day-to-day life and thus help in ending their social isolation.

4.5.3.4. Understanding

As leaders ministering to the elderly, we will work to understand the needs of the elderly and help them. This is a very important skill a pastor or a helper must have. The leader will make the community understand their responsibility to the elderly. The leader can make people appreciate the need of the aged for care and support. The need for the active participation of the aged in all social activities will be emphasized. This will end their social isolation and infuse them with optimism, which is so essential for their well-being.

4.5.3.5. Caring

The elderly need care, love and fellowship. We will see that his need of love and fellowship is addressed in our interaction with them. The leader is the person who cares for others. We will establish such a caring relationship in the center and help in providing emotional support to the elderly.

4.5.3.6. Maintaining Unity

The day-care center undertakes an integrated ministry and so it is essential to maintain unity in the various departments or units in the center. The leader here will ensure unity by encouraging cooperation and coordination among the personnel involved in the functioning of the various units of the center. Unity also reflects peace and growth through finding and sharing of resources. Giving and taking will become possible only if there is unity in the center. The leaders will work to educate the elderly on the need for pooling resources and utilizing them for their own cause.

4.5.3.7. Sensitivity

We will be sensitive to the needs of the elderly. It is through this sensitivity that we can find the required resources for the needy, to speak for the aged, and to step into their shoes with empathetic understanding. The elderly also will be helped to be sensitive to the needs of the other members of the community. Besides, the community will be sensitized to the needs of the elderly through the activities of the center.

4.5.3.8. Interpersonal Relationship

We will earn the respect and trust of the elderly and use this goodwill in bringing peace and harmony in their lives. Interpersonal relationship⁴ skills will be used to work through the difficult relationships, for not all the elderly are the same. They may be bitter towards society, family and self.

4.5.3.9. Creativity and Confidence

With the confidence of reaching the goal, all innovative and useful insights will be used to meet the needs of the center.

4.5.3.10. Flexibility

Rigidity will not help the center to move forward. So, we will be flexible enough to meet the demands of the center and needs of the elderly and help the center grow into dynamic and vibrant structure.

4.5.3.11. Faithfulness, Integrity, Courage and Genuine Dedication

Faithfulness, dedication, integrity and courage are the cardinal virtues indispensable for a leader. These are absolute requisites in a spiritual leader ministering to the elderly. Such a leader of the center will address the problems of the elderly with honesty and sincerity and find appropriate solutions acceptable to the members concerned.

4.5.3.12. Calm in Crisis

The leader will work through the problems of the elderly promptly. They will try to resolve the crisis with equanimity. All attempts will be made to avoid

⁴ B.J. Prashantham, *Indian Case Studies in Therapeutic Counseling*, (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1994), 4

bringing personal issues and interests to interfere with the activities of the center.

4.5.3.13. Mentoring

The elderly need to be mentored to empower them to use their skills and expertise to make their lives productive and meaningful. It is to this task that a leader is called and committed. Therefore, we will mentor the elderly to empower them to responsibility and independence. The staff includes the elderly, who will be empowered to help themselves and the others. The staff will be trained on aspects of handling burnouts, stress and fatigue. Anger, bitterness and narcissism will be worked upon in-Christ. As we work to understand ourselves each day, we will look into the need of righteous and devout life. We will help those to whom we minister to understand their call in this world in their sunset years, their accountability to God, to family, to society and to themselves. Thus, the center will work to help the elderly member grow as a person. It is only when we as leaders anticipate the aging in us and prepare ourselves for that universal fact, that we can identify ourselves with the elderly, making it easier for us to work with them.

Therefore as leaders, we will work to come to terms with the realities of life as we work to help the elderly face the realities of life. As we seek the redeeming grace of the Holy Spirit to guide us in our journey in this world, we will help those we are mentoring, to empower them to a fruitful life in Christ, and for Christ.

Thus we have seen that leader is good at leading, decision-making, motivating, understanding, caring, maintain unity, sensitive, calm in crisis, flexible, faithful, with integrity, courage and genuine dedication.⁵ A leader should also be good at “mentoring.”⁶

4.6. Pattern of Ministry at the Day-Care Center for the Elderly

Initially, this service will begin with the gathering of the elderly twice a week at the center. This will be different from the institutionalized set up of old-age homes. The main intention behind this day-care center is to free them from the feeling of segregation, desolation and self-loss. They should not feel this as a place that alienates them from the rest of society. This will be a place where they have the privilege of access to various facilities of the center, the facilities they cannot otherwise have, when they are alone or in a hostile environment. They will remain part of their respective families and at the same time have access to a warm, cordial and friendly place to discover and utilize their potential, which can benefit them and the others. The elderly will have the opportunity to creatively utilize their time through the various programs at the center.

The program of the center will start at nine in the morning with a worship service in the chapel. This will be helpful to those who are unable to attend the service on Sunday due to various reasons. The Priest will conduct

⁵ Notes of the Class Interaction on the emphasis of Various Definitions of Leadership Held at a Youth Leaders Course in E.C.C. Bangalore Conducted by M.J.Joseph the Director of Ecumenical Christian Center, March 1996.

⁶ Walter C Wright, *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Leadership Service*, 44.

the Holy Communion service for the elderly. This service will include a sermon, offertory, singing, scripture reading and intercessory prayers. During the service, the choir will sing the songs requested by the elderly. There will be time for feedback after the service. Later, the elderly desirous of singing will practice hymns to be sung for the next gathering at the center. Scripture reading for the next worship will be assigned to the elderly.

A special meeting, a class or a retreat will be held after the worship followed by a tea break. Discussions and sharing sessions will be held as per the schedule. After lunch at the center, the elderly can rest and relax or avail themselves of the facilities at the respective units. The elderly can use the library to read newspapers, magazines and other books. They can interact with their peers who come there. The elders can watch TV within the stipulated time and at four in the evening, tea and snacks will be provided.

The elderly will be entertained by the cultural programs conducted by the center in association with other organizations of the church like the youth's and women's organizations and Sunday schools. Community dinner will be held on such days. Once in a month, there will be a general body meeting, where issues and strategies pertaining to the administration of the center will be discussed. The grandchildren entrusted with the elderly will be taken care of by the baby sitters of the center. This ensures the participation of the elderly without undue stress. The older children will also be engaged in various activities, without disturbing the elderly. As we have discussed earlier, the schedule is not change-proof. The schedules will be flexible enough to

accommodate the varied interest of the members of the center. The cultural program may be substituted with a visit to the homes of the sick or the ones who are unable to make it to the center. At six, the program of the day will conclude with prayer and benediction. Those unable to travel will be provided with conveyance and escorted back home.

We will welcome suggestions from the elderly, regarding changes to be made in the program. During the week, the elderly can come to the center and make use of the services of the units as per their needs. So programs and activities that suit the needs and accommodate the interests of the aged will be planned under the direction and guidance of the leader. Leadership skills will be applied in the ministry to the aged, to make a difference in their lives.

4.7. My Role in the Center

As a theologically trained woman, the elderly look up to me for emotional and spiritual support through prayer. I have worked as a counselor to the elderly in an old-age home in the southern part of India, and I would lead them during their prayer time and help them seek solace through the comforting verses of the Bible. I belong to a parish that has many elderly members. Many of them are lonely and look forward to my companionship. I listen to their grievances and share their grief and anguish. I find time to care for them and I try to be by their side, when they are depressed. I try to meet their spiritual needs through prayer, preaching and house visits, despite denominational and cultural constraints.

Today, I look forward to realize the desire of the elderly for a more non-institutionalized homey atmosphere. The elderly have a lot of unproductive free time on their hands and the center will offer them an opportunity to utilize their time and potential fruitfully. All the activities aimed at promoting the wellbeing of the elderly can be executed systematically through the center. I look forward to prepare and consecrate myself for this challenging venture, by establishing this center and using my leadership skills in ministering to the elderly. My preaching skills will enable me to provide spiritual support to the elderly and my counseling skills will guide, nurture, and provide them with healing support. Thus, my theological training will help me empower the elderly. My endeavor will also empower the theologically trained women by providing scope for utilization of their training and skills for the cause of the elderly and for preparing them for leadership roles in the ministry.

My vision is to step beyond the constraints, respond to God's call, and use the entire God-given talents, training and skills to serve the Lord, to the best of my abilities in the role of a servant-leader in the center.

4.8. Conclusion

Thus, this project is designed to meet the multi-dimensional needs of the elderly. A holistic and integrated approach is used to minister to the aged. The focus of the plan is to cater to the whole personality of the elderly. The various activities of the center will ensure the active participation of the elderly. The center will help them find suitable jobs and engage them in social work. This provides an opportunity for the elderly to use their skills and

expertise. As a result, they will find peace, tranquility and serenity in their lives. Preaching, counselling and leadership aim at holistic development of the elderly. The whole plan is designed to understand the elderly, provide companionship, and help them to find meaning and a sense of purpose in the sunset years of their lives and help them be useful to God and man.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND OUTCOME

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will deal with the possible positive and negative responses to the plan developed. There could be negative response to the plan, but the positive elements of the plan will help me, a theologically trained woman, to carry out the ministry to the elderly successfully. The positive elements of the plan are their practicality in ministering to the elderly in their sunset years and helping them to live and die in hope and peace of the Lord.

5.2. Evaluation

As we evaluate this project, we see that a theologically trained woman, in her attempt to develop a plan to minister to the elderly, in the light of cultural and denominational realities of India is stepping into a very risky and a challenging venture. She may not have enough supporters to help her in the development of the project, because of the cultural and denominational realities, that are not favorable to her. Besides, the concept of the ministry to the aged may not appeal to the younger generation, as they think they will never gray and will remain young forever. The churches too have not given this ministry serious thought, as they do the other ministries.

The demographic transition accompanied by social and cultural transition has undermined the status of the elderly. It has not only affected the family but also the churches too. It is against this backdrop that the proposed project needs to evolve. The origin of this project has taken its roots from one's sense of call,

the spiritual nourishment and the empowerment received from the training at the theological seminary. This training has helped in transcending the constraints, and to move forward for a transformational ministry among the elderly. This ministry involves understanding the problems and needs of the elderly. This ministry attempts to help the elderly help themselves, to adjust to the aging process, cope with the realities and use their God-given potential in a fruitful way. This ministry will extend the necessary support to the priest in the Mar Thoma Church by reaching out to the alienated and serving the neglected in the church. This project also utilizes the unutilized theologically trained women in the active service of the church.

5.3. Positive Responses

This project with its integrated approach will be a very valuable investment in the ministry to the elderly. The holistic approach will not only help the elderly, but it will also help all those related to them. This will definitely be an encouragement and a wake-up call for the indifferent women folk to find opportunities in leading a life of fruition in the Lord, rather than be passive and indifferent to the call of God in their lives. To be more specific, the positive responses of various categories are as follows:

5.3.1. Women's Response

To the elderly women, this project will be of great advantage as they will be able to use their time more meaningfully and creatively. They will have the privilege of using their skills and experiences for the common good. Widows staying alone and with children, but experiencing conflicts in life can profit from

the counselling unit and other services of the day-care center. The activities of the center will give them much-needed fellowship and companionship.

The aged staying alone and unable to carry out their work independently will receive support and service, for example in payment of bills related to electricity, telephone, and water at the respective offices and in carrying out banking transactions. They will be able to spend more time in prayer among prayer groups and lead a devotional life. Their participation in devotional activities will make visitation of church leaders possible and this fellowship will provide emotional succor to the aged. There will be a possibility for the aged to engage in religious activity regularly. All the constraints on free movement will be worked out, by providing transport facilities. Indian women, who do not have the right to parental property and have no means of livelihood can manage their day-to-day life, with the support of the financial department of the day-care center. Women facing legal hassles can avail themselves of legal assistance from the day-care center. It will make them relax in the face of problems. Childless couples and those with none to care will find solace through fellowship and care at the center. Their participation in the activities of the center boosts their inner being and encourages their physical, intellectual and spiritual growth.

5.3.2. Family's Response

The day-care center is a support to those who have the elderly to care for at home. The families will be educated on ways of caring and handling the aged. This will eliminate unnecessary conflicts and hostile environment at home. Children who leave their elderly in search of livelihood can seek the support of

the center for giving them care and assistance. Families that need counseling help will find this a good place to begin to work out conflicts and misunderstandings that result from a generation gap. The center will gently persuade the children to respect their elderly and the elderly to adjust to the changing times. The center will counsel the children on the need to respond and interact with their elderly in a more humane way. This will prevent the elderly from feeling neglected and isolated.

Family orientation with regard to the needs of the elderly will help the elderly as well as the family adapt to the situation in a more constructive way. The elderly have the privilege of enjoying the friendly and cordial ambience of the day-care center any time of the day, and return to the familiar surroundings of the family at the end of the day. Thus, the elderly can avoid the secluded atmosphere found in the home for the aged or an institutional set-up.

The support system provided by the day-care center will help in strengthening the coping mechanism of the elderly, with regard to their physical, financial, psychological and social needs. This type of project will focus the attention of the government, schools and churches on the needs and concerns of the elderly. This integrated program is a tool to erase the misconception of the aged as a homogeneous group with incurable problems.

5.3.3. Church's Response

With the growing population of the elderly, the responsibility of the church towards the elderly is also growing. Therefore, the church should have a better

understanding of the needs of the elderly. This project will sensitize the church to the needs of older people.

The day-care center with its integrated approach hopes to transform the lives of the elderly by restoring their rightful place in the society and ensure a participatory role in the activities of the church. This is entirely in contrast to the segregated, institutionalized set-up, the church has for the old and the infirm. The day-care center encourages better interaction of the elderly with the other members of church. This, in turn, enables the church to appreciate the needs of the elderly for a better spiritual and devout life. As a result, pastors, evangelists and the other ministers making frequent visits to the elderly becomes a reality. Thus, the elderly will find spiritual support from the visits of the clergy. So, the day-care center aims to effect a fundamental shift in the perspective of the church and nurturing a new pattern of thinking with regard to the issues and concerns of the elderly.

The church pays lip-service to the cause of the elderly by observing a day of the year as Senior Citizens Day. This tokenism will not help the cause of the elderly. Therefore, this ministry will engage the church, in re-ordering its priorities and in initializing pro-active measures to ameliorate the conditions of the elderly. The church can help the elders to live and die in the peace of the lord. The church can use the services of the elderly and vice-versa. Preaching, teaching and ministering to the aged will help not only the elderly, but also society. Society will learn to accept the elderly with all their frailties and weaknesses, and respect their need for space and freedom.

The Mar Thoma Church has to be mindful of the needs of all age groups. It has to plan activities, suitable to all the groups. For example, the worship in the church should be meaningful to the young and the old in the congregation. The sermons should meet the demands of both the groups. The Church has always tried to cater to the needs of the younger generation but has been found wanting where the elderly are concerned. In such a situation, the day-care centre is a blessing to the elderly as it focuses its attention exclusively on the needs of the elderly. It formulates plans and executes the programs to ensure the well-being of the elderly, through its ministry for the aged.

5.3.4. Society's Response

Man is a social being. He cannot live in isolation. He needs the support of the society. The day-care center not only helps the church and the individual, but the society as a whole. It reaches out to the people with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The day-care center, through its social-service wing, offers a host of services to the society. It equips the elderly to a participatory role in the society, family and country.

The rich experience and wisdom of the elderly is an asset to the country. As we have already seen, they are reservoirs of experience and skills. The center will channel their skills in the right direction and enhance their capabilities. This helps the elderly develop a positive coping response to problems they are likely to confront in their lives. The day-care center will be a link between the government and the aged. It will sensitize the government on the needs and

concerns of the aged. It will assist the government in framing a favorable and friendly policy for the aged. This will enable the nation to handle its booming elderly population with maturity. The day-care center's efforts together with the friendly policy of the government will help and support the elderly in their attempt to have meaningful sunset years.

The day-care center will help organizations in establishing such centers in every state, city and locality, to take care of its aged. The elderly will have an opportunity to keep track of their health needs. They will have an opportunity to use their leisure more fruitfully and creatively. The center will educate and empower the elderly to transform challenges and adversities into opportunities in life. Needless anxiety and fear of death as well as issues emotionally disturbing to the elderly will be addressed by the counseling unit of the center. The elderly will have various tasks cut out for them at the center. These tasks provide opportunities for the elderly to make useful contributions for a common cause. This results in the elevation of their status in the center. This also moves them from the periphery to the mainstream of the various social institutions.

When the younger generation are busy and preoccupied with their education, career and other interests, they tend to ignore the elderly. So the elderly feel alienated and suffer from depression, loneliness and anxiety. Therefore, it becomes mandatory for the church to care for the elderly. The priest of the Mar Thoma Church functions within the parameters set by the constitution of the Mar Thoma Church. The scope of his religious duties is defined by the statutes of the constitution of the Mar Thoma Church. His freedom is restricted to

the activities permitted and approved by the Church. The priest devotes time for the Sunday schools and the youth leagues of the Mar Thoma Church, because these are the basic units of the Church. The priest is unable to pay attention to the needs of the elderly, as there is no well-defined unit for the elderly warranting attention, in the Church. It is in this context that a theologically trained woman can be a helpful resource person. She can assist the priest by taking up the cause of the elderly. She can plan activities exclusively for the elderly and ensure their participation, thus making them feel important and useful. Thus she can share the ministry of the parish, by ministering to the aged and help in the growth of the church.

5.4. Negative Responses

As we present the details of the proposed day-care center to the church and to the society, there will be a lot of skepticism with regard to a woman heading such a huge project. Initially, people may not appreciate the project. It may seem ridiculous to them, as their perception of the needs and concerns of the aged is flawed. They consider the aged a useless baggage, an unnecessary burden to the nation. Besides, the deep-rooted prejudices against the leadership role of a woman in the male dominated society of India will prove to be a stumbling block during the implementation of the program. She may not get the necessary support from the people in the area and from the authorities concerned. Her role, as a leader heading the center will be viewed with suspicion and may not get an affirmative response from the society. Necessary resources to establish the center and fund its activities will be hard to come by. It will be an

uphill task to coax the elderly to break out from their traditional and rigid pattern of thought processes. The onus of bringing about a major paradigm shift in their thought process, from their attitude of self-negation to one of self-confidence and self-belief rests with the leader of the center.

Families may not find it necessary to have a center for the aged. They may think they are doing enough for their elderly by satisfying their material needs. The youngsters may discourage a participatory role for the aged out of fear that the aged may encroach on their space and freedom. They may also feel their power is being curtailed by the elderly. They may also fear the reinstallation and reinforcement of status of the elderly in the families. In some instances, families may discourage any institutional care for the aged, as they think that their elderly can get better care at home than they can at any center or institution. This day-care center does not meet the need of families that are not interested in admitting their elderly in a home away from home on a permanent basis. Therefore, they may not appreciate the concept of a day-care center.

The government may not evince any interest in the establishment of the day-care center, since this entails heavy expenditure. The government may not like to employ the aged for its administrative work nor would it like to prolong the service of the ones who are employed with it. The government will be interested in easing out the old from service in order to make way for the young. Therefore, lack of proper support from the government may affect the quality of care in the center.

Some negative responses can be expected from the elderly too. There may be some who are unwilling to spend time away from the family. Some may not have an inclination for an active participatory role in the center. Women may not find encouragement from their family to take part in the activities of the center. Some other factors that can hamper the progress of the project are non-availability of a suitable location for establishing the center, and a lack of funds and trained staff such as specialists and counselors to operate the various units of the day-care center.

Thus, any project will evoke a positive and a negative response from the community. But the need, the possibilities, and the potential of the aged, combined with the leadership qualities of a person that is the caregiver will ensure the smooth functioning of the center.

Therefore, my stepping into this challenging ministry itself will be an encouragement to the theologically trained women of our church. The elderly, especially women will find comfort in the new development. This project will be a revelation to the society on the pressing need of a ministry for the elderly in the church. The elderly will have an opportunity to use their potentials and find a new meaning in their lives. The younger generation will take comfort from the fact that their elderly are taken good care of, at the center. I will find my identity in Christ and a meaning and purpose for my life in this world. I will be able to work for the empowerment of oneself, the elderly and the church and make my vision a reality.

5.5. Conclusion

We have dealt with the cultural and denominational constraints of an Indian church that denies leadership roles for a theologically trained woman. We then looked into the theological background in which a seminary-trained woman develops a plan to minister to the elderly. In the third chapter, we examined the literature available on the subject being addressed. We dealt with the design of the project in the fourth chapter followed by the evaluation and the possible outcomes of the project in this final chapter.

We have taken into account the cultural and denominational realities in relation to women in India. Despite the constraints, a theologically trained woman with her sense of call to minister to the elderly plans to develop a ministry for the aged. This is very challenging and therefore needs total commitment and dedication. But the caregiver should be empowered in order to serve the elderly and empower them. Her theological education has empowered her. She is a trained women minister who feels that spiritual evolution in a person is a prerequisite to becoming a good preacher, teacher, care-giver, prophet and a model to those being served. This is possible by the nurture of a devout life in Christ. The women characters of the Bible examined are a case in point. Therefore, a theologically trained and spiritually evolved woman can proceed with the plan to develop a ministry for the aged.

The project is designed to meet the various needs of the elderly in an atmosphere similar to that of their own home. They are given the opportunities to

help themselves and to exercise their potential, thus giving them more self-respect and meaning in their lives.

The government and the churches have not given a serious thought to the aged. What little they have done has resulted in institutionalizing the elderly in old age homes, where they remain segregated. The proposed center aims at meeting the expectations of the elderly to pray, to share, to listen, to have fellowship, and encourages the young to respect the views of the elderly and to understand their struggle for a meaningful and happy life of hope and peace in the Lord.

Therefore, a theologically trained woman need not wait for official consent and approval but can go ahead with her unique call, finding her identity in Christ with integrity, accountability and spiritual maturity. She can use the platform given by God to empower others. This will lead to the empowerment of oneself, the elderly and the church as a whole.

The next step to bring the plans laid out in chapter four into reality is: Sunday the 24th of Feb 2008 I was elected to represent, my parish for three years at the representative assembly of the Mar Thoma church also called the Prathinidhi Mandalam were matters concerning the church is finally decided. Representatives of Mar Thoma parishes in India and abroad will attend the meetings once in a year. This is a good development as its an exposure for me and a platform to communicate my plan to others. I have already started communicating that I am heading to graduate this year. This makes my church interested in knowing what my thesis topic is and what I intend doing after I

graduate. This in itself will open up a way to communicate the need of the elderly and the need for setting up a ministry for them. I will let the church authority know the intensity of the issue and present my plan to them. Many of the elderly are already happy with my ministry with them. All those with whom I associate comment on my special gift to deal with all age group in a very cordial and acceptable manner. I will extend my support to the clergy of my church in the already existing ministry to the elderly thereby expand my ministry to the elderly and create a need to set up a Day-care center.

On learning that I would be graduating this year, one of the Bishops of my church expressed his desire to involve me in the programs for the elderly in his diocese. I will communicate my plan to all the philanthropists, private and government agencies and seek their financial help to begin a Day-care center for the elderly. Meanwhile, I will look out for a suitable place to establish the Day-care center and begin the ministry initially in some hired building. When I attempt in making the Day-care center a reality and begin a fruitful ministry, it will become obvious that the theologically trained women are particularly suited to minister to the elderly in the light of the cultural and denominational realities of the Mar Thoma Church in 21st century India.

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